

# Sweet Mothers and Gangbangers: Managing Crime in a Black Middle-Class Neighborhood\*

MARY E. PATTILLO, *University of Michigan*

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## *Abstract*

*Black middle-class neighborhoods have higher internal poverty rates and are closer to high-poverty and high-crime areas than white middle-class neighborhoods, which presents particular challenges to neighborhood social organization. This study uses ethnographic data from a black middle-class neighborhood in Chicago to explore how residents manage this ecological context. I find that dense social networks fostered by residential stability facilitate the informal supervision of neighborhood youth and enhance the activities of formal organizations and institutions. Nevertheless, the incorporation of gang members and drug dealers into the networks of law-abiding kin and neighbors thwarts efforts to completely rid the neighborhood of its criminal element. The conflicting effects of dense networks challenge traditional social organization theory.*

The research on African Americans is dominated by inquiries into the lives of the black poor. Contemporary ethnographies and journalistic descriptions have thoroughly described deviance, gangs, drugs, intergender relations and sexuality, stymied aspirations, and family patterns in poor neighborhoods (Dash 1989; Hagedorn 1988; Kotlowitz 1991; Lemann 1991; MacLeod 1995; Sullivan 1989;

*\*This research was part of the Comparative Neighborhood Study conducted at the University of Chicago under the direction of William Julius Wilson and Richard P. Taub. Research support was provided by the Ford, MacArthur and Rockefeller Foundations. I would like to thank Reuben A.B. May, Robert Sampson, Jeffrey Morenoff, Christopher Jencks, Sudhir Venkatesh, Ray Reagans, the Comparative Neighborhood Study, and the anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts of this article. Direct correspondence to Mary E. Pattillo, Poverty Research and Training Center, 540 E. Liberty, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, or e-mail to pattillo@umich.edu.*

Williams 1989). Yet, the majority of African Americans are not poor (Billingsley 1992). A significant part of the black experience, namely that of working and middle-class blacks, remains unexplored. We have little information about what black middle-class neighborhoods look like and how social life is organized within them. In the tradition of grounded, sociological community studies (Anderson 1978, 1990; Suttles 1968; Whyte 1943), this article begins to fill this empirical and theoretical gap using ethnographic data collected in Groveland, a middle-class black neighborhood in Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

Groveland is home to one of the top gang leaders and drug dealers in Chicago, as well as to one of the highest ranking black officials in city government. The young people who grow up in the neighborhood are as easily introduced to the gangs and their drug business as they are to the neighborhood political organization. This article explores how the two co-exist and maintain what residents refer to as a “quiet neighborhood.” I argue that variables shown to affect neighborhood social organization — especially residential stability and the strong informal ties that stability fosters — have not been sufficiently unpacked to illustrate why and how they help or hinder social organization. In Groveland, stability and dense networks do not prevent criminal behaviors. Instead, they work to circumscribe the criminal activity that does exist by holding the neighborhood delinquents within the bonds of familial and neighborhood associations. There exists a system of interlocking networks of responsible and deviant residents that sometimes paradoxically, and always precariously, keeps the peace.

### Theories of Social (Dis)organization

Social organization is goal-oriented. *Social disorganization* is defined as “the inability of a community structure to realize the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls” (Sampson & Wilson 1995:45); hence, social organization refers to the effective efforts of neighborhood actors toward common ends. These ends are similar across populations. Regardless of the social class or racial composition of a neighborhood, most people share a “common goal of living in an area relatively free from the threat of crime” (Bursik & Grasmick 1993:15). Moreover, disorder — public drinking, loitering, street harassment, corner drug selling, vandalism, abandonment, and litter — is neither desired nor condoned in any kind of neighborhood. There is a consistent, positive relationship between disorder and neighborhood dissatisfaction, citizen withdrawal, and crime levels (Skogan 1990). Because proscriptions against crime and disorder are similar across neighborhoods, including Groveland, the more interesting issues are the types of neighborhood contexts in which residents enact these values and their organizational strategies.

Social (dis)organization theory contends that a neighborhood's socioeconomic status is negatively related to ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability, both of which are positively related to crime (Byrne & Sampson 1986; Shaw & McKay 1942). Heterogeneity and instability work through their negative impact on informal and formal social control, where *social control* is defined as "the effort of the community to regulate itself and the behavior of residents and visitors to the neighborhood" (Bursik & Grasmick 1993:15). Both heterogeneity and instability hamper communication, decrease residents' familiarity with one another, and decrease their attachment to the neighborhood and its organizations, all important components of social control. A later reformulation of social organization theory — the systemic model — also stresses the importance of kin and neighborly ties for the social control of crime and disorder (Berry & Kasarda 1977; Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Sampson 1992).

One of the persistent challenges to social organization theory has been the existence of residentially stable neighborhoods with continuing high rates of crime (Suttles 1968; Whyte 1943). The systemic model's explanation for these apparent anomalies is that, while internally integrated, these neighborhoods lack essential ties to public forms of social control such as the police, government bureaucrats, and social service agencies. Low-income neighborhoods also have weak internal economies and lack sufficient connections to mainstream employment. Finally, the neighborhood's low status decreases its bargaining power in securing valuable city services, further impeding residents' attempts at social control. Thus, the disadvantaged social class make-up and the lack of ties to nonneighborhood actors cancel out whatever internal organization may exist (Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Guest & Lee 1983; Logan & Molotch 1987; Oliver 1988; Warren 1975).

Stable low-income areas may develop organized criminal subcultures where the "neighborhood milieu [is] characterized by close bonds between different age-levels of offenders, and between criminal and conventional elements" (Cloward & Ohlin 1960:171). In such locales, neighborhood stability can foster the formation of an alternative opportunity structure based on organized crime, which benefits both criminal and law-abiding residents. These relationships across the law provided the basis for organized crime among Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants alike (Ianni 1971, 1974; O'Kane 1992). More recent studies of poor neighborhoods also find that neighborhood delinquents provide important social and economic resources to their lawful friends, kin, and neighbors (Jankowski 1991; Sullivan 1989; Venkatesh 1996, 1997). These arrangements mirror the processes described in this article. However, crime and the subsequent alliances between criminals and noncriminals develop in these neighborhoods only because of "the pressures generated by restrictions on legitimate access to success-goals" (Cloward & Ohlin 1960:171). In other words, "Poverty and powerlessness are the root of both community acceptance of organized crime and recruitment into its networks" (Ianni 1974:38). It would follow that such pressures do not exist in middle-class

neighborhoods where residents have the human and social capital to prosper in the legitimate occupational structure. How, then, can we account for an extensively organized and visible criminal element in a stable middle-class neighborhood such as Groveland?

### The Unique Black Middle-Class Neighborhood

Groveland is a black neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago with a population of just under 12,000 residents, over 95% of whom are African American. The official community area covers approximately 91 square blocks. Ridge Lake Avenue, a six-lane thoroughfare, cuts through the middle of the neighborhood, and most residents refer to only the western half as "Groveland" proper, even though the sections are very similar. The fact that Ridge Lake Avenue separates gang territories is one explanation for the local understandings of neighborhood boundaries.<sup>2</sup>

The median family income in Groveland is nearly \$40,000 annually, while the comparable figure for Chicago is just over \$30,000. Over 60% of the population are white-collar workers. The majority of the dwellings are owner-occupied, single-family brick homes with modest front and back yards; there are very few apartment buildings. Most residents work diligently to keep the neighborhood clean and their yards and houses attractive.

There are two public grammar schools, a Catholic grammar school and one public high school. There are eleven churches in Groveland representing ten Christian denominations; six of these churches belong to the Groveland Clergy Association. Within Groveland there is a park — Groveland Park — that is a part of the Chicago Park District. There are three commercial streets within the neighborhood reported to be "the busiest predominantly black shopping district in the state."

Although there are sizeable physical boundaries on the east and west that enclose the neighborhood, and somewhat restricted access at the north and south borders, Groveland is integrally tied to its surrounding neighborhoods. It is a part of a larger black middle-class population residing on the city's South Side. Within the official community area of Groveland is the subdivision Cedar Cove where the motto is "suburban living in the inner city."

By income and occupational criteria, as well as the American value of home ownership, Groveland is a middle-class neighborhood, and residents refer to it as such. Yet Grovelandites are not doctors, lawyers, and corporate executives (Cose 1993). The black class structure is truncated at the high end such that in 1993, only 18% of black families nationally had incomes over \$50,000, whereas 37% of white families had such incomes (Smith & Horton 1997). The black middle class resembles the white lower-middle class (Collins 1983; Landry 1987; Wilson 1995). They are administrative assistants, small business owners, police officers, teachers,

**FIGURE 1: Median Family Income, Poverty Rate, and Homicide Rate, Groveland and Surrounding Neighborhoods, 1990**

<p><i>Treelawn</i> \$17,500 32% 16.0</p>		
<p><i>Trainer</i> \$23,000 23% 10.4</p>		<p><i>Beecher</i> \$23,500 25% 9.8</p>
<p><i>Bristol</i> \$29,500 12% 5.4</p>	<p><b>Groveland</b> \$39,500 12% 6.0</p>	<p><i>Steeler</i> \$26,000 22% 10.1</p>
<p><i>Seedville</i> \$30,000 13% 11.6</p>		<p><i>Elm Heights</i> \$42,500 7% 1.7</p>

Sources: *Local Community Fact Book Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1990*; and Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority 1994. Morenoff provided the homicide statistics.

and government bureaucrats; and in 1990, nearly 12% of Groveland's residents were unemployed.

Geographically, black middle-class neighborhoods tend to be nestled between areas that are less economically stable and have higher crime rates. Figure 1 provides three statistics for Groveland and the surrounding neighborhoods. Below each neighborhood's pseudonym is the neighborhood's (rounded) median family income; next is the percent of families with incomes below the poverty line; the third figure is the 1990 homicide rate per 10,000 residents.

Figure 1 shows that all but one of the neighborhoods bordering Groveland have lower median family incomes. The poverty rate is also higher in four of the six adjacent neighborhoods. Taking this exercise one (geographic) step further, the Treelawn community area — north of both Trainer and Beecher — has a median family income of just under \$18,000, not even half the median family income in Groveland. Its poverty rate of over 30% is nearly triple that of Groveland. All these contiguous neighborhoods are over 90% black, illustrating Chicago's hyper-segregation (Massey & Denton 1993).

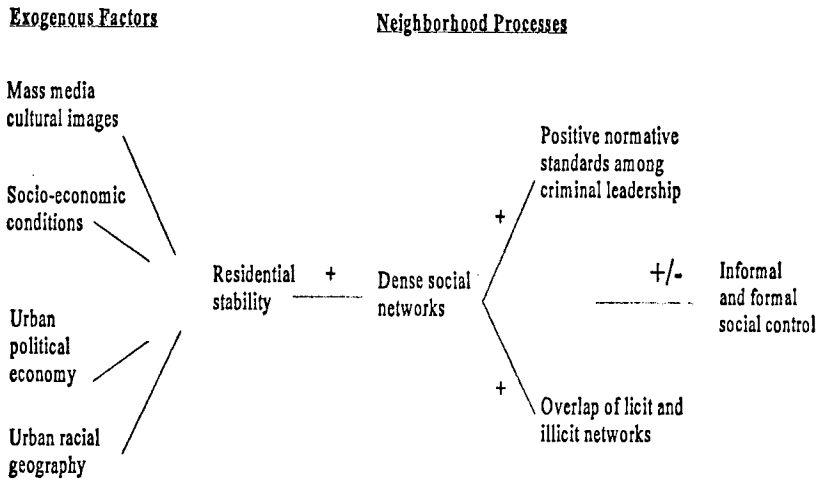
Finally, using a measure of the most violent kind of crime, Figure 1 clearly illustrates the perils associated with living in a black middle-class neighborhood. All but two of the adjacent neighborhoods have higher homicide rates. For comparison, a white middle-class neighborhood in Chicago (Beltway) was also included in the larger project of which the present study is a part (see Methods section). The homicide rate for Beltway is only 1.4/10,000. Furthermore, the rates for the three community areas that surround Beltway are 1.8, 2.4, and 0.4 homicides per 10,000 residents, barely overlapping with the levels of violence in the Groveland area. The poverty rates in and around Beltway are similarly low when compared to the community surrounding Groveland.

The proximity of Groveland to poorer, less stable neighborhoods underscores the importance of the spatial context of black middle-class areas. While the black middle class has attempted to leave poor neighborhoods (Wilson 1987), they have not gotten very far. The higher poverty and higher crime areas nearby are constant reminders of what could happen if Groveland residents' efforts at social control fail (Morenoff & Sampson 1997). Black middle-class residents must struggle to remain in the majority and define the norms of public conduct and social order. The larger community depicted in Figure 1 also represents a dangerous training ground for Groveland's youth who are not confined to the small area of the neighborhood.

The ecological patterns observed in Groveland are not unique. African Americans of every socioeconomic status live in qualitatively different kinds of neighborhoods than their white counterparts. In a revealing exercise, Sampson and Wilson (1995) use census data to locate similar black and white ecological contexts. They find the following: "In not one city over 100,000 in the United States do blacks live in ecological equality with whites . . . *The 'worst' urban contexts in which whites reside are considerably better than the average context of black communities*" (42, emphasis added).

The residential returns to middle-class blacks are far smaller than those to middle-class whites. Massey, Condran & Denton (1987) compare similar black and white families in Philadelphia and the kinds of neighborhoods in which they live. Focusing on indicators such as the proportion of out-of-wedlock births, median home values, neighborhood poverty, and the educational performance of students in the local high school, the authors find dramatic differences between

FIGURE 2: A Grounded Model of Neighborhood Social Control



neighborhoods. For example, the probability for neighborhood contact with a family on welfare for college educated blacks was 22%, whereas college educated whites had only an 8% chance of such contact. This pattern was repeated for contact with blue-collar workers, high school dropouts, unemployed workers, and female-headed families.

With regards to exposure to crime, the black middle class is again at a disadvantage, even in the suburbs. "Even the most affluent blacks are not able to escape from crime, for they reside in communities as crime-prone as those housing the poorest whites" (Alba, Logan & Bellair 1994:427). Other studies have found similar disparities (Darden 1987; Erbe 1975; Farley 1991; Grossman & White 1997; Landry 1987; Massey, Gross & Shibuya 1994; Villemez 1980). Massey & Denton (1993) conclude that for blacks, "high incomes do not buy entrée to residential circumstances that can serve as springboards for future socioeconomic mobility" (153). Finally, being black and middle class does not allow for much excess in terms of either meeting ordinary expenses (Landry 1987) or accumulated wealth (Jaynes & Williams 1989; Oliver & Shapiro 1995). As one Groveland resident put it: "I think the average black person nowadays are all middle class mostly. They're struggling everyday to make it. You could go any way any day."

All these obstacles affect the ability of these residents to realize common goals and values. These spatial and social particularities also begin to answer the question

of how a visible criminal element could persist in a predominately middle-class neighborhood. Segregation has ensured the continued confinement of blacks of various socioeconomic statuses into fixed geographic areas. These segregated black neighborhoods bear the full burden of disproportionate poverty among African Americans. All families in black middle-class neighborhoods are not equally endowed with the resources to steer their children in positive directions (e.g., paying for music lessons, sports leagues, and equipment) or to buy for their youngsters the status symbols of contemporary youth consumer culture. Socioeconomic disadvantage assists in making mainstream values “existentially irrelevant” for a portion of the population (Sampson & Wilson 1995). Economically marginal adults are equally captivated by the fast money that crime promises. These orientations are easily taken on by middle-class youth whose parents could provide some luxuries, but never enough to satisfy the wants of most American adolescents.

Crime in Groveland and the middle-class origin of many of its deviants require a complex incorporation of structure — the changing employment market, the differential allocation of municipal resources, and the effects of segregation — and culture, such as the appeal of popular media “gangsters.” These factors impact social organization and social control in Groveland, but are largely exogenous to local interactions and events. (See Figure 2.)

The neighborhood-level focus of this article guides attention toward the way in which social connections between residents affect the management of crime. The mix of residents and lifestyles has consequences for the proximate sources of social organization, such as the collective supervision of neighborhood youth and organizational participation and activism (Bursik & Grasmick 1993; Freudenberg 1986; Kasarda & Janowitz 1974; Sampson & Groves 1989). Ethnography is an appropriate method for investigating these microlevel processes.

Drawing from the systemic model, I reiterate the importance of residential stability for the creation and maintenance of social networks. The first empirical section of this article highlights the thick kin, neighborly, and friendship ties that exist in Groveland, across the boundaries of legitimacy. The second section describes how these networks positively impact both the informal and formal supervision of youth. Informal social control refers to the daily management of behaviors in casual settings, whereas formal social control involves actors who represent local institutions as well as official law enforcement agents. My argument departs from both social organization theory and the systemic model, however, in the explanation of how these networks facilitate control. As Figure 2 illustrates, dense social networks have both positive and negative effects for social control through specific mediating processes.

Neighborhood familiarity does not stop residents from getting involved in gangs and drug dealing. It does, however, keep them connected to nongang adults and youth who constantly monitor their illegal operations, demanding that they conform to neighborhood norms of order. Groveland’s criminal element also



constitutes a valid local organization in the neighborhood and levies considerable social control on its members. This structure is described in the third empirical section of this article. Groveland's gang leaders were raised in the neighborhood. They often concur with the norms of the church and block club members and hold their youthful charges to similar standards. Both factions spurn disorder, actively combat graffiti, and show disdain for activities that may invite negative attention, such as loitering or public fighting. Also, both groups explicitly desire economic prosperity. The "occupational status" of the neighborhood drug dealers mirrors that of neighborhood residents who work in the legal sector. At the same time, these interlocking networks and the similarities in interests and behaviors make it difficult for law-abiding residents to totally rid their neighborhood of the criminal element, thus negatively affecting social control.

For the most part, the two groups agree on goals, but disagree on strategies. Living in a black middle-class neighborhood requires that law-abiding residents compromise some of their attitudes — such as the scorn for drug dealing and the violent enforcement that goes with it — for the achievement of a "quiet neighborhood." This unique, adaptive strategy for social organization rests on a tenuous integration of and intermittent truce between the networks of gang members and the business of drug dealing on the one hand, and the activism of church leaders, block club members, and local political officials on the other.

## Method and Data

This research used the participant observation method (Lofland & Lofland 1984). The primary data were collected over a two and a half year period in the early 1990s for the Comparative Neighborhood Study (CNS) conducted at the University of Chicago. The CNS investigated racial discourse, culture, and social organization in four neighborhoods of different racial and ethnic composition — one white (Beltway), one Mexican American, one in transition from white to Mexican American, and Groveland. A second field worker worked in Groveland, although the majority of the field notes presented here were collected by the author.

The research included intensive participant observation in informal settings in the neighborhood such as Groveland Park and the local churches. I also conducted interviews with key leaders and lay residents, and regularly attended meetings of the Chicago Area Policing Strategy program, the Chicago Park District, Groveland's political organization, and the Chamber of Commerce. I minimized the problem of selectivity by getting involved in a wide range of activities and social networks, which yielded substantive conversations with gang leaders as well as social service providers, grandparents, and toddlers. Although limited to those people who did actually leave their own homes, the participant observation component of this project tapped a rich cross-section of Groveland residents. Demographic

information, newspaper clippings, photographs, neighborhood flyers, and other supportive data were also collected throughout the study.

After the completion of the CNS, I moved to Groveland, continued the participant observation, and conducted 28, taped, in-depth interviews. Three pilot interviews also contained useful data. Interviewees were identified by a snowball sample and were chosen to represent residents from across the social class and age spectrum. The breakdown of social class positions was formulated taking into account the literature on the black class structure (Blackwell 1985; Landry 1987; Vanneman & Cannon 1987; Wilson 1978). Because the goal of interviewing was to gather a variety of residents' opinions, rather than have quantifiable data, the relaxed method of sampling was satisfactory.

All the interview and participant observation data were coded into over 30 general themes of interest. The coding process substantially increased my familiarity with the material by guaranteeing at least three layers of experience with the data: (1) the social interaction itself (interview or participant observation), (2) writing field notes or transcribing an interview, and (3) re-reading the notes for coding purposes. This article draws primarily from the inspection and organization of the following codes: gangs, drugs, guns, recollections of crime, intergenerational interaction, social networks, political participation, and the role of churches.

The arguments in this article should be read as a conversation between the specificity of people's words and actions in Groveland and the grand declarations of sociological theory. Following the methods of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967), existing sociological theories and categories were used as "sensitizing concepts" (Schwartz & Jacobs 1979). I had introductory knowledge of theories of social (dis)organization and social control as laid out by early Chicago School theorists and as refined by contemporary scholars. As a result, I focused on the informal ways that adults controlled the behavior of younger residents. Hence, some of the codes used to analyze the data, such as intergenerational interaction and social networks, reflect particular concerns raised by the literature.

Nevertheless, much emerges from the process of field work itself that cannot be anticipated by existing theories. As Lofland and Lofland (1984) point out:

The researcher does not only (or mainly) wait for "significant" (sociologically or otherwise) events to occur or words to be said and then write them down. An enormous amount of information about the settings under observation or the interview in process can be apprehended in apparently trivial happenings or utterances, and these are indispensable grist for the logging mill (46).

Hence, analytic codes like "discussions of guns" or "the role of churches" became particularly salient only after being in the field and logging the minutiae of everyday interactions. Moreover, because neither the CNS nor the present author was interested exclusively in social control in Groveland, the plan for writing field notes was to be as exhaustive as possible. It was only through the constant re-inspection of the notes that significant themes grew out of mundane and unrelated

interactions. The conclusions for this article were reached through the simultaneous processes of collecting data and coding it, and then going back to the field to further explore those codes; that is, the ideas were reached inductively through theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

## Social Organization in Groveland

### NETWORKS INTERTWINED

“GANG BUSTED” read the headline of a Chicago newspaper:<sup>3</sup>

In a blitzkrieg of police work reminiscent of the lightning attacks of the 1980s on the El Rukn street gang and the Herrera family of heroin peddlers, about 250 law-enforcement officers swooped down Thursday to make arrests after the indictment of 39 alleged Black Mobsters.

This “victory” for Chicago law enforcement — the article’s subtitle read, “We Ripped Off the Head of the Snake” — has had less than predictable results in the neighborhoods on Chicago’s South Side, including Groveland, much of which is Black Mobster territory. Social organization in Groveland is partially dependent upon the social control levied by neighborhood gang leaders on their local troops. Keith, a 26 year-old resident, described the neighborhood before the bust as follows:<sup>4</sup>

One of the biggest gang leaders in Chicago, on the South Side, live right around the corner. And he ain’t gon’ let nothin’ happen in his neighborhood. He don’t want a lotta stuff goin’ on ‘cause he don’t wanna lose his house. He control alla these little gangbangers. Like he got together with some of the churches and stuff and got that liquor store closed over there. You know, I won’t say he all bad, ‘cause he does do a lot of good things for the community. But he do ‘em for the wrong reasons.

The former supervisor at Groveland Park also talked about the complex position occupied by the Black Mobsters in organizing the neighborhood:

The kids really protect this building. No graffiti, well sometimes we’ll get some, but they don’t let that go on. No fighting, no break-ins. ‘Cause there are gangs around here. I forget what they call themselves, Black somethings. But this is like a neutral zone. The gym show this weekend, Friday and Saturday, they [the gang] did security. They bought blue security t-shirts to match the kids’ and they were all over the building. They had walkie-talkies and everything. They were in the front halls and all around the back. There were about thirty of ‘em and we didn’t even have to use the police. ‘Cause, you know, I had called the police to provide security ‘cause we must have had about two thousand people in here over the weekend. But they were better than the police.

Gangs are a reality of neighborhood life in Groveland. Both comments above illustrate that gangs are not uniformly depicted as the scourge of the community. Residents must reconcile the “good things” that gangs do (and the good people within gangs) with their “wrong reasons.”

The density of neighborhood networks and the prevalence of family and fictive kin ties underlie the tangled relationship between gangs, drugs, and the forces that fight against them. Intimate networks are created and maintained when people live near one another for long periods of time (Sampson 1992). Seventy percent of the housing units in Groveland are owner occupied, serving to economically tie residents to the present and future of the neighborhood. A full 70% of the residents in Groveland moved into their homes before 1980, which means they had lived there at least ten years at the time of the 1990 census. In the area of Black Mobster rule (west of Ridge Lake Avenue) almost half of the residents moved into their current residence before 1970. These demographics indicate the stability necessary to form intimate social bonds, and bonds from childhood remain very much alive among adults in the neighborhood.<sup>5</sup>

The Vincent Family illustrates these enduring ties. Husband and wife Kim and Joseph Vincent both grew up in Groveland, although Kim lived in the neighborhood first. “Where I grew up we were like a family on the whole block,” Kim describes. “You know, the next door neighbors babysat me and now I babysit their kids, you know. I’m their godmother and their mama’s my godmother. So it’s like a family.”

Before Joseph Vincent moved to Groveland himself, he would come to visit his cousins who lived on Kim’s block. When Joseph first saw Kim, he told his cousins he would marry her. Kim and Joseph both agree that it was love at first sight, although it took nearly fifteen years of off-and-on dating before they finally got married. After getting married, they bought a two-flat building in the neighborhood, rented the bottom and basement apartments, and Kim opened a day care in their top floor apartment. When their family grew, they bought a single-family house four blocks away (still in Groveland) and rented the apartments in the two-flat. Some days after school, their 8-year-old son drops his bags with his mother at her day care and walks the three blocks to visit his grandparents who continue to live in the house where Kim grew up. Many residents in Groveland have these kinds of close extended and spatially proximate family ties.

Fictive kin networks also flourish in Groveland (Anderson 1978; Chatters, Taylor & Jayakody 1994; Stack 1974). Neisha Morris’s description of a part of her family tree illustrates how time erases the lines between blood and nonblood relatives. Neisha explains, “My uncle was her godfather. So that’s why I say we cousins. It was like we’ve been knowing each other since little babies. You know, on pictures together. I been knowin’ her forever, so that’s why I say she my cousin.”

Not only are families connected horizontally through siblings or cousins, intergenerational networks (often in one household) are also very common. Nearly 8% of children in households live with a grandparent (City of Chicago 1994), and

18% of Groveland families are “subfamilies” — usually childless married couples, or married or single parents who live in the household of another family unit. This commonly refers to a multigenerational or extended family household.<sup>5</sup> Reverend Darnell Johns, pastor of St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church in Groveland, described this phenomena:

Let’s say a young woman who used to live in this neighborhood, she gets married and goes on her own. She has two or three children. She and her husband are having a difficult time and they break up and she moves back home with her parents. And so what happens is that she ends up being here with the children, and then the grandparents end up having to extend the whole parenting again.

Reverend Johns pondered aloud the effects of this type of family organization, concerned that the “cultural difference between a grandmother and a grandchild” would hamper communication and weaken the parental authority of the grandparent. This lapse in control, argued the Reverend, “creates a whole host of new issues and problems.” Particularly, the break in communication is a break in social control. Johns noted:

These people who are speaking [about problems in the community], it often is many of their children and many of their grandchildren who are contributing, you know, to the problems of the community. And what it is is it’s just, it’s just denial. It really is. You’ve kinda given me some food for thought. Maybe that’s a good forum or workshop, you know, to have at church — the generational dilemma in our community.

The “generational dilemma” that Reverend Johns refers to points to a complication in child rearing and supervision in the neighborhood. The extended family network has long been a positive feature of African American families (Billingsley 1968; Stack 1974). Yet having numerous adults in a household does not always translate into more or better supervision of youth. Instead, the role ambiguity of grandparents and parents, and the lower energy levels and limited financial resources of grandparents strain the familial relationship, grandparents’ love and commitment notwithstanding (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn & Zamsky 1994). At the same time, Reverend Johns’s comments foreshadow how dense networks can connect upstanding members of the community to neighborhood delinquents. These relationships make it difficult to uniformly crack down on neighborhood crime because few parents and grandparents are able to see their own child or grandchild as being a bad apple and deserving of punishment.

Numerous extended family networks, specifically those spanning generations do, however, increase levels of familiarity within the neighborhood. In turn, mutual familiarity means that residents, especially youth, are exposed to antisocial networks as well as legitimate ones. The schools provide one local arena where disparate groups come together. Because the lives of classmates can take different trajectories, many Groveland adults have acquaintances on the other side of the law, if only by

default. Thirty-three-year-old Kelly is in his second year of an M.B.A. program at a private Chicago university, while a childhood friend of his was caught in the city's round-up of the Black Mobsters. Kelly reports:

I actually went to school with one of the top [Black Mobster] lieutenants who graduated, who lived on Third and Granger. I knew that family very well. Ah, but now he's in jail. The top lieutenant whose name was, whose nickname was Lance, is in jail. He's facing an array of charges, so he's gonna be there for a while. But his little street minions are still there.

In Groveland, everybody knows Lance. He went to the local public schools; he and his siblings participated in activities at Groveland Park, and now their children also attend Groveland School and frequent the park. Lance's position in the neighborhood is more multifaceted than the narrow title "gang leader" might imply. He is a father, uncle, neighbor, former classmate, and as was already mentioned, Lance has been a community activist, participating in the successful effort to close down neighborhood liquor stores.

Each of Lance's 'minions' also shares this plurality of roles, thereby making some residents feel safer. Strangers are a certain cause of fear (Anderson 1990; Merry 1983). Yet, as Charisse described, gang members in Groveland are rarely strangers.

I know most of 'em. Because it's not like anybody came into the neighborhood. Most of the people in this neighborhood are like grandparents now, so they've been here a long time. And it's a lot of their kids and grandkids. So it's still people that I grew up with, and people that I saw all the time. People I went to school with. So, it's not a change. I mean, I see them more and I realize what's going on more. But it's not a case, I don't feel unsafe, you know.

Forty-year-old Alberta Gordon echoes these sentiments:

I don't carry a knife. I don't carry mace. I don't feel that this is something [I need to do]. And I feel that if anything happens to me coming home it will not be someone in this neighborhood because they know me. They know my sister. They know my brother.

Ms. Gordon got agreement from her teenaged son who chimed in: "They gotta deal with my grandmother."

Grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, neighbors, classmates — this density of relationships in the neighborhood forged through high levels of home ownership and long-term residence has created an intricate system of socialization that produces top-level city politicians as well as high-ranking gang leaders. Moreover, for many residents, this web of networks, and their embedded position within it, generally makes for a "quiet neighborhood."

The structure, however, does break down. Fifteen-year-old Brandon Johnson was shot and killed one January afternoon on one of Groveland's quiet streets. His obituary chronicled his activities, listed his affiliations with local institutions, and illustrated his intense involvement in neighborhood networks:

He confessed his belief in Christ at an early age. He was a member of St. Timothy's Church under the direction of Reverend Darnell C. Johns. He was a youth member at St. Timothy's Church. He attended Benton High School as a sophomore. He played Basketball/Football at Benton. He was a member of the YMCA where he played Basketball. He had just started a part time job at Ridge Lake Groceries. He was a counselor for the City Wide Program during the summer.

This description shows that Brandon was actively involved in positive local and city-wide activities. One involvement the obituary did not mention, however, was Brandon's peripheral gang affiliation. As one of his peers described him, "Brandon was like a real good person. He wasn't really *too into gangs* or whatever." Another youth said, "He was trying to change. You know, he was a little, he was bad. Really bad. I mean, not he, I mean, well he got killed. He was changing his life around and he was actually good, you know. He was turning it around."

The details surrounding Brandon's death were as sketchy as his gang affiliation, yet both point to the intricacies of overlapping neighborhood networks. Brandon lived with his mother, stepfather, grandparents and siblings in the house that his grandparents moved into nearly 30 years ago. Both his mother and grandparents were churchgoing people and clearly passed on that orientation to Brandon. His grandparents had been involved in the church-sponsored "March Against Drugs." Ironically, Brandon was killed in an identified drug house where he had been visiting his girlfriend. His funeral was attended by a mix of members of his church youth group, classmates from his high school, and a group of young men who, in other locales, had been known to flash gang signs, wear gang paraphernalia, and use gang-member greetings. All these associations, however, did not alter the perception of Brandon as "like a real good person" who was "turning it around." This plurality of associations and roles that is characteristic of the Groveland networks affects social control efforts.

#### INFORMAL AND FORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL IN GROVELAND

Brandon's death prompted a special community meeting called by the pastor of his church. Nearly thirty neighbors and family members attended to discuss the need for increased police presence in the neighborhood, expanded activities at the park, and reinvigoration of the block clubs. These concerns are repeatedly raised in casual conversations and neighborhood meetings, and there are ongoing efforts by a number of individuals and community groups to further this agenda. These efforts, and the players involved in carrying them out, rest on one side of the see-saw of Groveland's social organization. The consensus in these groups and the approach they take to working on problems was expressed at a Local School Council meeting by Mr. Wilson who pointed out, "We have to take responsibility for all of our children. The same children that are beating up on our children are also our

children. They go right around the corner when they go home. They are our children.”

Most responsibility for “our children” is taken on informally using the strong extended family and friendship ties within the neighborhood. Alberta Gordon discussed this informal control:

Some of the kids call me Ms. Gordon. Some of ‘em call me Mama G. And I told them the reason I want them to feel comfortable in calling me Mama G is because I grew up calling people on this block by their last name or ‘Aunt’ whoever the person was. For instance, Tanya’s mother, I still to this day call Aunt Sarah. It was a respect and extended family [kind of thing]. So there are a lot of young people that I do know that call me Mama G. And I have no problem in telling them that they’re wrong about doing something. And no problem in going to their parents because I know their parents . . . [And I] have told their parents in return, if [my son] Michael is doing something and you know it’s wrong, correct him and then let me know so that I can deal with it.

At Groveland Park, Ms. Spears put Ms. Gordon’s sentiments into action:

A teenaged girl walked to Ms. Spears to ask a question, but before she could get it out Ms. Spears spotted that the girl was wearing an electronic pager. Ms. Spears asked her sternly, “Whose beeper is that?”

The girl responded, “It’s my father’s.”

Ms. Spears continued with a barrage of questions and directives, “What are you doing with a beeper? You don’t need a beeper. Give it back to your father. I don’t care if it’s yo’ brother’s, mother’s, father’s—you don’t need a beeper. It’s not becoming. Take that beeper back to your father right now!”

The girl responded, “He’s right in there. He knows I got it.”

Ms Spears said in a serious voice, “Take it to him right now.”

The girl turned around to do as she was told.

In associating a pager with drug dealing, Ms. Spears thought it was inappropriate for a respectable young girl to be wearing one. Being a neighborhood disciplinarian requires a certain amount of respect and renown that Ms. Spears has cultivated in the nearly 20 years she has lived in Groveland, raising her children and now her grandchildren there. She is also an employee of the Chicago Park District and for many years has worked in Groveland Park, which is across the street from her home. She is seen by many of the youth as a grandmotherly figure, and she addresses most people, young and old, with the sugary pleasantries “honey” and “baby.” Her long-time residence means that she can intervene in children’s inappropriate behaviors, confident that her intervention will be acceptable with the children’s parents.



Similarly, Spider has lived in the neighborhood most of his 30 years, went to the local schools, and works as a recreation leader at Groveland Park. He uses this neighborhood-level legitimacy to coordinate men's pick-up basketball on Sunday mornings. Spider is the keeper of 'the list' — the roster of names used to determine the next team to play. He frequently deviates from the list, moving up his friends' names or giving some players special choice in their teammates. His final decisions are respected. When tempers flare and the playing rules are ignored, Spider always has the last word. Once, after a controversy over a personal foul, Spider ordered, "All you mothafuckas that lost, get the fuck off the court." When the losing team did not move from the court, Spider responded, "Fuck that. The mothafucka is closed. Gimme my goddamn ball." He took the basketball and turned off the lights in the gym announcing, "Shop is closed!"

Spider always handles conflict with this same blunt and direct swiftness. Furthermore, his amiable relationship with Lance and the Black Mobsters augments his status as an official park employee and gives him authorization to settle disputes and make decisions within the park, especially among young people. The key to promoting comfort and feelings of safety is to lessen anonymity. Yet the more people are familiar with one another, the more illicit networks are absorbed into mainstream connections and thereby normalized. This is the conundrum that plagues social control efforts in Groveland.

"Concerned residents" are enraged by gangs and drug activity. When informal mechanisms fail to control these activities, residents turn to the next level of social control — local organizations and institutions (Hunter 1995). These two levels are not separate, as the above examples illustrate. Employees of the local park are also long-time neighborhood residents, as are church leaders, business people, and police officers. Local organizations and institutions are only aggregations of the informal private ties that individual residents possess, increasing the ability to address the concerns that residents cannot tackle individually.

Residents air their complaints in community meetings (of block clubs, police beats, the Local School Council, church groups, the Chamber of Commerce). Gangs and gangbangers top the list of their concerns. According to an older man at a local police beat meeting, gangs are "worse than anything. They can just take over!" The formal neighborhood institutions direct their efforts at preventing this takeover.<sup>7</sup>

The residents who express their concern and anger over changes in their community — young people playing loud music, leaving trash on their lawns, stealing backyard furniture — frequently recognize that putting up gates around the entire neighborhood would not rid Groveland of the problems they are experiencing because the troublemakers are natives. One woman at a beat meeting complained of young men "gangbanging" (i.e., congregating) on her corner and of one man in particular who she thought was in charge. But, she said, "I didn't wanna give this young man's name [to the police] because his mama is such a sweet lady."

This comment illustrates that while dense neighborhood networks and the resulting familiarity can improve some informal efforts at social control, it can thwart the use of public or formal means of control.

Many local institutions do, however, boast successes. The Chamber of Commerce has been active in efforts to keep the main commercial strip and the entire neighborhood thriving. One member of the executive board of the chamber talked about how the organization "got the pay phones out on the streets set up so that there are no incoming calls and no coin-generated calls after a certain time. This was particularly to stop any drug dealers from using the phone."<sup>8</sup> The chamber has also been successful in using the city's "Graffiti Blasters" program to promptly remove any graffiti from area businesses.

In addition to their proactive efforts, businesses are also supportive of other local organizations and institutions. When a group of block clubs teamed up with the Alderman's office to plan an anti-drug march, many businesses donated materials and food to help out. One organizer announced, "Mr. Brown over at Diamond Groceries is donating all the hot dogs, buns, and relish we need." The president of a Groveland block club said he could always count on the local grocery stores to donate food for his annual block party, and the area bank to donate money. Similarly, when the Catholic church's youth group planned an overnight retreat, two fast food restaurants donated food; and when the same group planned a career fair, a local record store donated door prizes. Residents and organizers depend on the businesses to support their efforts to provide positive activities in the neighborhood.

The churches spearhead social organization efforts in Groveland. Groveland United Church of Christ hosted a string of community meetings at which they made specific demands of the alderman, the police, and the public school principal. They targeted three drug houses in the neighborhood, two of which were eventually closed by the city. The church also complained of gang activity on the public elementary school playground and demanded that the police monitor the playground to make it unattractive to gang recruiters. At the next meeting, the police sergeant responded to these demands: "Immediately following the last month's meeting, we made arrests of some kids with spray cans on the school grounds. We will continue to work toward these goals," he assured. St. Mary's Catholic Church was successful in getting a security guard placed at Groveland Park, as well as more programs and activities for teenagers.<sup>9</sup>

Concerned residents focus their energies and activities on curbing youth delinquency. Nearly all the projects they propose are concerned with connecting young people to positive activities and groups, and deterring deviant behavior. Residents also discuss the physical maintenance of the neighborhood, but this is frequently connected to the irresponsibility of idle young people, "gangbangers" who trash the neighborhood. Yet, for all the institutional support and commitment

of key leaders, the force against which they are fighting also has a strong organization, powerful leaders, and the buffer of actors who negotiate both networks.

#### THE BLACK MOBSTERS: ORGANIZATION OF A DIFFERENT SORT

“Folks” is the gang “nation” under which the Black Mobsters are positioned (see Hagedorn 1988 for a discussion of the “People” and “Folks” nations in Milwaukee). The Groveland Park field house was a gang stronghold for much of this research. “What up, Folks?” was a conspicuous greeting at the field house. So, too, were six-pointed stars, hats tilted to the right, t-shirts with the picture of their jailed gang leader, and the color blue. Despite these signs, members of the “organization,” as they called it, consistently declared:

Ain’t no gang problem around here. You come up to the park and you don’t see no graffiti or nothin’ like that. These people around here think we got a gang problem. This ain’t nothin’ like Lorry Park [another park on the South Side]. I used to work up at Lorry, and say you used to bring your son up there to play. The boys would come up to him and take his ball and jump on him. And when he started to fight back because you taught him to stand up for hisself, they would be talkin’ about, “You don’t need nobody else. Come git wit us [our gang].”

Groveland’s Black Mobsters stop short of bullying the nongang members who use the park. In routine park activities, however, there are many times when ‘Folks’ use their organizational strength to control the park. For example, during a league basketball game a member of the “organization” was not getting much playing time. Someone from the stands called out, “All us over here came to see Pope play. Pope, go on in there and get you some time, man. Folks don’t sit on the bench. They play. You B-Mobster ain’t you? Then use yo’ Mobster weight.” Pope moved to the scorers table and checked himself into the game.

These shows of dominance are relatively harmless activities. In more than three years of fieldwork that included extensive visits to the park, two field workers together documented only one fight, no graffiti, and three cases of vandalism at the park. Blatant signs of disorder are absent from the park, and explicit gang-related activities, such as organizational meetings, are infrequent and always inconspicuous. This low profile allows gang members to use the park without eliciting much attention. As Cloward & Ohlin (1960) point out in their description of criminal elements in stable communities: “Social controls over the conduct of the young are effectively exercised, limiting expressive behavior and constraining the discontented to adopt instrumental, if criminalistic, styles of life” (171). When Lance and his employees and bodyguards congregated at Groveland Park (before the “gang bust”), they sometimes talked in hushed tones and acted in ways that betrayed their innocent veneer — making several trips to their cars, leaving abruptly in the middle of a conversation, or casting frequent and alert glances out of the window. But most often the young men played basketball, joined in on volleyball

games, coached the younger boys, played dominoes, or just socialized. In effect, they were neighborhood residents using their neighborhood park, and this is how the supervisor treated them:

I don't know, well I do know, but I can't be sure of what any one does. So I'm not going to be telling people they have to leave. My supervisors come down here and they tell me not to let 'em sit out in front there. But, again, what am I going to say? I can't tell them to leave because they're just sitting out there. I mean, I do understand the concern. You know since I've been here there hasn't been one fight. I don't hear a lot of profanity. I mean, I know people curse, but there haven't been any problems. I mean, they all grew up together. They live here. Plus, some of 'em have kids here, so that's an extra part of it. I mean, I can't tell people to leave.

As an official of Groveland Park the supervisor is a part of the formal social control apparatus. Yet, she is reticent to condemn the gang members who frequent the park because of their claims to neighborhood legitimacy. They have children in park activities and friends throughout the neighborhood, which justifies their presence.

The "civility" of the Black Mobsters at Groveland Park is part of their more expansive efforts to legitimize their illegal businesses. Newspapers describe the Black Mobsters as Chicago's largest street gang, and its tentacles span the Midwest. One resident described Lance's dominion as spanning the country, claiming, "This [the park] Lance's spot. Tell 'em Reggie, Lance is the man over alla them. He the man in the city. He a real Mobster. He run the Mobsters in the city, down south, Texas, and up north in Minnesota." The "organization" has been involved in assorted endeavors. The police investigation of their activities uncovered money laundering schemes through music concert promotions, political organizations, neighborhood restaurants, and even social service establishments.

While their city-wide strength is considerable, their territorial hold in the Groveland area is limited to a four-block by ten-block area. To the south and east are four other neighborhood-based gangs, all of which belong to a rival gang nation. To the north and west are Ruthless Mobsters, also Folks, but a different faction from those in Groveland. While this territorial crunch produces some turf battles, the organization is concerned with turf primarily as it affects drug sales. Lance manages the Black Mobsters' business on the South Side of the city, but keeps Groveland relatively clean — partially because he wants his family safe, and partially because residents are active in fighting against such activity. As a result, there is almost no corner drug selling and few drug houses in the neighborhood. Linda Brewer, who grew up on the same block as Lance, described what happened when a family tried to sell drugs in the neighborhood outside of Lance's organization:

Lance told them they couldn't sell the drugs. It really really got bad and people was comin' [from] outside the neighborhood. A coupla people got robbed and raped and beat up, you know. And a coupla people got in there and started drive by shootin's and stuff like that. So he told 'em they couldn't sell it. 'Cause he was worried about his, now he was worried about his mom, you know. So, now alla the sudden he said they couldn't sell drugs around here.

Faced with the unsupervised sale of drugs in Groveland, and the disorder that it was causing, Lance put a stop to this upstart enterprise. These prohibitions illustrate Lance's centrality as an agent of neighborhood social control.

Ironically, having an organized gang in the neighborhood has, in some respects, translated into fewer visible signs of disorder, less violence, and more social control. Lance operates from a profit motive, albeit an illegal one. Aside from that, he wants his family safe, he wants his neighborhood clean, and he wants his children to have healthy activities. Lance and his minions' indigenoussness to Groveland plays a role in these parallel interests of gangs and the upstanding citizens that fight against them.

#### MIDDLE-CLASS MOBSTERS

If there is a system of occupational stratification within organized crime similar to that which exists in the legitimate sector, Groveland represents the middle managers in both milieus. Nineteen-year-old Neisha Morris described the activities of her boyfriend, Tim, who sold drugs:

Well, see, Tim don't sell drugs on the corner. He did do that type of stuff but he got a pager, people can just page him. He don't sell drugs to people. He sell drugs to the niggahs that sell drugs. He not at the stage no more where he just sell to "hypes" [drug addicts] \$10 bags, little bags. You know, one of his friends like wanna buy some "work" [drugs] and they'll like pay \$800 for something and they work what they got from him. He say they bag it up and they sell it to hypes, like that. I guess he done moved up in the world. And it's like people that he buy his stuff from [that] got mo' money than him.

In her explanation of Tim's duties, Neisha described an occupational hierarchy (Padilla 1992). Tim was promoted from selling drugs on the corner to buying in bulk and selling to independent distributors who work the corners he once occupied. Above Tim are suppliers even more wealthy than he, who are likely to be subordinate to some even more powerful and wealthy drug dealer. In this occupational chain, Tim is not a laborer at the bottom of the totem pole. Having moved off of the corner, he is now able to work from his home. His job description fits that of a lower-level manager, or small-business owner, making him comparable to his neighbors who work similar jobs in the legitimate employment sector. Most Groveland residents have "clean jobs."

Another middle-class characteristic of Groveland is that the neighborhood is a bedroom community. Most drug selling takes place outside of the neighborhood and the profits are brought home to families like Neisha's. At the park, there were never drug exchanges, drugs present, or even obvious drug users or addicts. Corner drug selling is rare in the section of Groveland controlled by the Black Mobsters. The drug houses that are allowed to exist in the neighborhood were described by one resident as "drug salons," highlighting a hierarchy of drug-selling establishments. In drug salons, customers buy their drugs and leave, rather than congregating and creating the social disorder that accompanies drug use (Williams 1992). The money is to be made elsewhere, outside of Groveland. One ex-dealer reports, "I'll say all the people over here go to the other side [of the railroad tracks] to sell drugs. That's where all the places to do it. They'll go on the other side."<sup>10</sup> The proximity of Groveland to low-income markets attests to the primacy of geography in explaining crime in Groveland. Like the residents in Groveland who commute to their legal jobs, Groveland's drug dealers do most of their business outside of the neighborhood, but the violent repercussions of the drug trade often spill over into their own territory.

Within the drug-selling world, as in the legitimate sector, there is also a visible lifestyle hierarchy. Those at the top, like Lance, drive fancy cars, wear expensive watches and jewelry, and are surrounded by helpful underlings. Over the years, those underlings (or minions) acquire fancier (but used) cars, begin to wear more brand-named clothing, and make more frequent trips to the barber. As the Groveland Park supervisor relayed to her white friends who had a particular image of gang members, "These guys wear Fila and shop at Burberry's [designer brand and upscale clothing store, respectively]. This is not like, you know, guys hanging on the corner smoking."

In addition to the accouterments of middle-class status, on some issues Lance's behavior borders on prudery, as illustrated in a conversation about one of Lance's parties.

"We had all kinds of food and shit," Spider boasted. "I stuffed myself. Man, I was full as hell. We had all kinds of waters too."

A friend who was eager to hear what one of Lance's parties was like asked Spider, "Y'all didn't have no liquor?"

Spider answered, "Naw. You know Lance don't have that kind of shit."

Lance's distaste for alcohol is common knowledge around the neighborhood. Also, as a good businessman he especially prohibits drug use by his "employees" and associates as well (Taylor 1990).

Much of this insistence on order stems from the organization's concern for the safety of their own parents, grandparents, siblings, sons, and daughters. Even more importantly, however, Lance was raised in this middle-class neighborhood. His behaviors illustrate his own desire to comply with the social norms. As Tracy Harris

described, “At Groveland Park, they [Black Mobsters] were the ones outside every morning to make sure that the kids got to the park safely. And they stopped traffic and directed traffic. And got the kids in the park.” She believed that the members of the Black Mobsters in Groveland were taught to be successful, and they are now passing on those middle-class orientations to their children:

They got themselves in a situation and they used that situation to the best of their advantage. And they’re working it. And that’s what it’s about. It’s like any other job. They’re working the situation to their advantage. And because they have some semblance of class, intelligence and some decent upbringing, they bring that back into the group in which they’re in. And when they raise their children, they raise their children with the same effects as they were raised — to achieve something, to go somewhere.

The homologous class position of many of the Black Mobsters and their law-abiding neighbors makes getting rid of them even more difficult for concerned residents. They share many of the same values for an attractive and safe neighborhood, and both groups want socioeconomic security, but they have divergent strategies for achieving those values. Yet, because the outcomes are often similar, the neighborhood’s betterment groups have a difficult time convincing their less-involved neighbors that there is even a problem. Apathy, based on what one resident called a “false sense of security,” plagues organizational efforts in Groveland.

Many residents feel secure precisely because much of the illicit activity is kept within the bounds of acceptable neighborhood behavior. Neighborhood fights, for example, are rare, a fact that makes rallying the troops difficult. As one older resident put it, “I never seen one. ‘Cause I call a fight several blows exchanged. Now wait a minute, there was a fight maybe about twenty-five years ago.” The paucity of incidents is partially a function of the gang’s deliberate control of such behavior, yet any incidents that do occur are usually gang related. There is a twist to the semi-effectiveness of gang organization: If no gangs existed, there would be no need for the protection that gangs provide. The same ironic logic holds for the coordinated, yet competitive, sale of drugs.

## Conclusion

The fact that a high ranking gang leader lives in Groveland does not significantly distinguish it from other neighborhoods regarding the integration of licit and illicit networks. Low-income neighborhoods have frequently supported, and often defended, their crime bosses as fervently as they would any other product of the neighborhood. Gang members everywhere are connected to parents, cousins, teachers, and even pastors, although to varying degrees in different neighborhoods. These connections require further investigation into how residential stability and network density can both facilitate and impede social control. What is particular

about Groveland as a middle-class neighborhood are the people to whom the illicit networks are linked, the unique strategies of organizing a diverse neighborhood that sits near higher crime areas, and the particular forms of illicit activities. The neighborhood organizers have myriad attachments to the neighborhood troublemakers. These links help in informally influencing behavior, but can hinder involving public agents of social control. Simultaneously, the social position of gang members and those involved in selling drugs mirrors the legitimate occupational status of other neighborhood residents. With some “reminders” by legitimate community organizations, they also operate under similar rules of conduct, and with similar goals.

Neighborhood social organization does not exist as an absolute value, but represents a continuum, the ends of which are complete chaos or utopia. Without denying the successes guaranteed by middle-class resources, this article highlights the unique obstacles that black middle-class neighborhoods face in maintaining stability and realizing common values.

The conclusions are summarized as follows. First, black middle-class neighborhoods have higher poverty rates, and are closer to poverty areas than white middle class neighborhoods, creating unique forms of social organization. Second, higher proportions of low-income residents, along with the unstable middle-class footing of many others, means that crime may be an attractive option to a significant minority of residents within the neighborhood and in nearby areas. Concerned residents are aware that there will be widespread disorder if they do not actively manage the criminal enterprises fostered by economic insecurity. The criminal leadership shares the mainstream desires for neighborhood order, albeit by different means. The third argument advanced here is that residents of Groveland have formed strong primary and institutional ties based on high rates of home ownership and residential stability. These ties promote neighborhood-level familiarity, integrate disparate networks, and facilitate informal and formal social control. Fourth and finally, however, these ties also thwart efforts to totally rid the neighborhood of gangs and drugs. The criminal minority — already a part of the kin and neighborly networks that exist, and often contributing to the support of local families — is given a degree of latitude to operate in the neighborhood.

This research advances social organization theory by elucidating the mechanisms through which the proximate sources of social organization work. Dense friendship and kin ties and institutional strength and participation allow for the integration of licit and illicit networks both working toward common goals, but with variant strategies. For theories of race and social mobility, focusing on the context within which black middle-class families live is important for understanding enduring racial differences in social indicators as diverse as educational performance and mortality rates. Investigating these processes in Groveland is a step toward ameliorating the dearth of research on the black middle class.



## Notes

1. All names of people and places have been changed to preserve anonymity.
2. With a few noted exceptions, demographic statistics in this article refer to the entire community area and are taken from the *Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1990* (1995).
3. The exact citation for this article is not in the References because the article contains the real names of people and places in Groveland.
4. Because interviews and especially field interactions were quite informal, many respondents used the Black English Vernacular. While I have edited some false sentence starts and rehetorical fillers (e.g., um, you know), I have not translated conversations into Standard English.
5. I asked interviewees about their "close friends." Respondents were allowed to name as many close friends as they wished. I then asked where these friends lived, their occupation, race and how the respondent met them. From these data I was able to determine the mean proportion of close friends who lived in the neighborhood across all interviewees, which was 49.1%. This nearly even proportion of local and nonlocal friendship ties is similar to what Oliver (1988) found in his study of three black communities in Los Angeles. However, working from ethnographic field data and the open-ended interviews used in this study, I have limited confidence in the above measure of the spatial dimension of network ties. I am much more convinced of the strong local ties by the experiential knowledge recorded in over three years of participant observation, and by hearing interviewees elaborate on their friendships and kin. My data are even less amenable to quantitatively analyzing the density of neighborhood ties.
6. For comparison, in predominately white Beltway, not even 2% of the children live with their grandparents, and only 3.7% of families are subfamilies.
7. Venkatesh (1997) describes a poor community in which the local gang had essentially taken over, replacing the previous authority of tenants' groups. The middle class organizational and financial resources in Groveland have inhibited such an absolute displacement of legitimate control.
8. While new technology has meant that drug dealers now have their own cellular phones from which to do business, when this initiative was first undertaken it would have limited the ability to use public phones for illegal business.
9. Both Groveland United Church of Christ and St. Mary's Catholic Church received the assistance of a nonprofit agency that specialized in organizing churches. Each church invited this agency to work with them, and paid a membership fee. The outside agency provided only training and technical assistance; it did not give specific directions or targets for social action. The proactive efforts on the part of the churches illustrate the independent commitment to getting involved in the neighborhood.
10. "The other side" refers to a small portion of the Bristol neighborhood (see Figure 1) with a high concentration of apartment buildings, and a much lower median family income and higher percent poor than other census tracts in the area.

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