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Policing Rock Bottom:

Regulation, Rehabilitation, and Resistance on Skid Row

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Sociology

by

Forrest Daniel Stuart

2012

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Policing Rock Bottom:  
Regulation, Rehabilitation, and Resistance on Skid Row

by

Forrest Daniel Stuart

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Stefan Timmermans, Chair

This dissertation engages a fundamental concern for sociologists, criminologists, and scholars of urban poverty: how authorities attempt to better control marginal social groups, and how those populations counteract and even resist these efforts. Drawing on five years of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and archival research, the dissertation analyzes daily life on the streets of Los Angeles' Skid Row district, a neighborhood widely-regarded as the "homeless capital of America," distinguished as containing what is arguably the largest concentration of standing police forces found anywhere in the country, if not the world. Tracing the historical trajectory of neighborhood development into current-day, street-level interactions between police officers and Skid Row's impoverished and homeless inhabitants, I argue that a new model of social control has emerged, tightly wedding rehabilitative and punitive interventions – what I term "therapeutic policing." Examining inhabitants' everyday experiences of Skid Row in the shadow of policing,

the text further examines a range of strategies – from quiet subversion to overt opposition – by which those in the neighborhood attempt to resist the mandates of therapeutic policing. Throughout the analysis, I demonstrate that the increasing omnipresence of surveillance, detentions, and arrests in Skid Row, and other marginalized and stigmatized urban neighborhoods, is fundamentally reshaping the manner in which residents come to understand themselves, their peers, and their communities.

The dissertation of Forrest Daniel Stuart is approved.

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2012

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## INTRODUCTION

On a sweltering summer afternoon in 2008, Darryl Watkins sat on the corner of Sixth and San Julian Streets in the heart of Los Angeles's Skid Row neighborhood, an area long-considered the "homeless capital of America." A balding African-American in his mid-fifties, Darryl had arrived in Skid Row several weeks earlier, drawn by the area's unrivaled concentration of inexpensive and subsidized housing accommodations. A veteran of the first Gulf War, Darryl has significant hearing loss in both ears, struggles almost daily with severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and has steadily developed a deepening addiction to crack cocaine. Clothed in a faded black t-shirt and dingy blue jeans, Darryl rested his backpack containing the majority of his possessions on his lap. He took a long drag from a cigarette and conversed with a group of other middle-aged African-American men who had similarly made this corner their home for the previous two weeks. The group laughed loudly as they shared jokes and stories, sought safety in numbers while they slept, and kept a watchful eye over each other's shopping carts and camping tents when one of the men elected to venture to the public showers or liquor store on the next block.

As Darryl ashed his cigarette into the brown pool of water stagnating in the gutter below his feet, a police squad car slammed to a halt several yards in front of him. The car doors flung open and within a split second the two officers were on top of the group, pushing Darryl and the other against a nearby concrete wall and slapping handcuffs on their wrists. After fifteen minutes of questioning, searching, and running their names through a database to determine any of the men had outstanding warrants, the officers handed Darryl a citation for littering, got back into their squad car, and disappeared up the street as suddenly as they had arrived.

For Darryl, this was more than a fleeting moment. Surviving on a monthly General Relief check of \$221 per month, he was unable to pay the citation's \$174 fine within the allotted time. As a result, the fine increased to over \$500, his driver's license was suspended, and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

Darryl's predicament was compounded several weeks later, when he was detained, cuffed, and searched yet again on the very same corner, this time for violating a municipal ordinance that prohibits anyone from sitting on the sidewalk – a misdemeanor and arrestable offense within the boundaries of Skid Row. However, instead of following through with the arrest, the officers offered Darryl an unexpected ultimatum. He had a choice, they told him. Either they could immediately take him to jail, or he could walk over to the nearby Union Rescue Mission and admit himself into a residential recovery program, where he would participate in drug counseling, bible study, and employment training. Facing these options, Darryl chose the latter. The officers watched him closely as he made his way inside the doors of the rescue mission.

Three hours later, however, with the sun setting behind the downtown skyline and the two officers long gone from the street, Darryl emerged from the building. Yet he did not resume his position alongside his companions on the corner. Fearing that the highly visible group would continue to attract police reprimand, he trudged deeper into Skid Row to find a more secluded location to sleep. Here, in a small alleyway between two seafood storage warehouses, Darryl erected a makeshift lean-to from discarded cardboard boxes. Amidst the stinging scents of urine and discarded fish, he laid his head down for the evening.

But the move toward isolation brought neither sleep nor reprieve from the police. Just after 6:00am the next morning, Darryl was arrested and transported to the Central Division

police station alongside five other men that had been caught in one of the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) weekly homeless sweeps. The booking officers offered Darryl the same ultimatum as before – enroll in rehab or go to jail – which he accepted once more. This time, however, he was passed along to a case manager seated in the next room of the police station who, after a short intake interview, personally escorted Darryl to the mission's recovery program two blocks away to ensure that he did not abscond a second time.

Three weeks later, however, Darryl was again back on the streets. We sat together sharing a bag of peanuts on a bench in one of Skid Row's two small parks. He shook his head disapprovingly as he recounted his recent stay in the Union. "I don't know what's worse – going to jail for a couple days or living in that place for the whole twenty-one days they got you in there. Honestly, I just can't listen to their bullshit all day long, you feel me? I don't need all that nonsense they're trying to sell in there. What I *really* need is to do a better job at staying the hell out of the back of that police car. That's like a full-time job down here!" Indeed, over the next few weeks, Darryl devoted increased attention to discerning which neighborhood locations, people, and behaviors he needed to avoid in order to reduce the probability of landing in handcuffs yet again. These efforts ultimately proved futile, however, as Darryl's next arrest kicked off a series of stints circulating between the police station, jail, and the rescue missions.

\*

With the passage of the Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) in 2006, experiences like Darryl's have become a daily, if not hourly occurrence in Skid Row. Launched by then-LAPD Chief William Bratton, SCI instantly made the neighborhood home to arguably the largest concentration of standing police forces found anywhere in the country, if not the world (Blasi and Stuart 2008). At an annual price tag of \$6 million, the initiative redeployed an additional



fifty patrol officers as well as thirty narcotics, mounted, and bicycle officers into the .85 square-mile area. In the first year alone, LAPD officers made roughly 9,000 arrests and issued 12,000 citations among a population of approximately 12,000 to 15,000. These numbers come at a rate that is sixty nine times higher than those found in other parts of a city already known nationwide for its aggressive policing policies (Blasi 2007). On a larger level, Safer Cities represents one of the most drastic expressions in a trend of “broken windows” policing programs – a criminal justice approach affording “zero-tolerance” to minor forms of “disorder” such as loitering, panhandling, and sleeping on the sidewalk – that have swept the globe since the early 1990s.

Darryl’s repeated interactions with the Safer Cities Initiative speak to a fundamental and pressing concern for sociological and criminological theory: how authorities attempt to more effectively control marginal social groups, and how those populations attempt to counteract such efforts. While the SCI arrest and citation numbers are startling in their own right, officers’ street-level engagements with, and the lived experiences of, Darryl and other Skid Row inhabitants raises pressing questions regarding the contours and implications of these social control tactics; questions that are of interest to social scientists and policymakers alike. First, how are policies like SCI reshaping the manner in which cities regulate impoverished, homeless, and marginalized urban groups? Second, how do these new forms of policing shape the broader social organization and everyday experiences of impoverished and stigmatized communities? More specifically, how do the targets of policing respond to and resist this regulation?

Darryl’s multiple run-ins with Skid Row police present a puzzling though compelling complication to the current scholarly narratives that look upon trends of hyper-criminalization and mass incarceration to declare the dawn of a “post-rehabilitative” era of urban governance. While officers were notably aggressive toward Darryl and the others – detaining, handcuffing,

and interrogating them for behaviors that can be found among residents in even the most affluent and “decent” neighborhoods – these officers have systematically mobilized their coercive interventions toward explicitly rehabilitative and transformative ends. Darryl’s story reflects several further intriguing developments, including a close partnership between criminal justice and non-profit social service organizations, as well as an implicit medicalization of the issues associated with extreme poverty – including homelessness, unemployment, addiction, and crime – in which individual treatment and personal choice both play prominent roles. What explains these unexpected dynamics, and what are their consequences?

Additionally, by looking closely at Darryl’s and others’ reactions to multiple, and sometimes daily detainments, citations, and arrests, we can begin to shed much-needed light on the manner in which marginalized populations respond to, and even resisting these new forms of regulation. By questioning how such interactions shape daily life, we can also begin to explore how the police are emerging as a central, though heretofore largely overlooked, neighborhood actor, forcefully shaping the social conditions that marginalized urban communities increasingly confront. This dissertation takes up these issues, following officers, inhabitants, organizations, and other prominent neighborhood interests throughout Skid Row’s dense web of interactions in both the historical and contemporary contexts.

## **Skid Row Los Angeles**

The shortest route between Heaven and Hell in contemporary America is probably Fifth Street in Downtown L.A. ... [A]cross the no-man’s-land of Pershing Square, Fifth Street metamorphoses into the ‘Nickel’: the notorious half-

mile strip of blood-and-vomitspewn concrete where several thousand homeless people – themselves trapped in the inner circle of Dante’s inferno – have become pawns in a vast local power struggle. . . . [T]his landscape – whether we recognize the location or not – has insinuated itself into the contemporary imagination.

(Davis 1987: 65)

In this passage, Los Angeles historian Mike Davis (1987) aptly captures the dual nature of Skid Row, known locally as “the Nickel.” On one hand, Skid Row is a physical, geographic location. In city planning documents and official records, Skid Row is defined as the 50 square-block area located on the eastern flank of downtown Los Angeles, between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets bounded by Main Street on the west, and Central Avenue on the east (figures 1 and 2).

Given the residential instability of the Skid Row population, precise demographic characteristics prove difficult to come by. Yet, comparing and compiling estimates produced by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), the Los Angeles Housing Department (LAHD), the US Census, and several other government sources, it is reasonable to conclude that roughly one-third of the neighborhood population is characterized as homeless – living on the street, in shelters, or in temporary housing. The remainder of the population lives in permanent or semi-permanent housing – single room occupancy (SRO) hotels, residential hotels, and apartment buildings. Males make up approximately 80% of the population, which is predominantly African-American (70-75%). Latinos (20%) and whites (8%) are the second and third most represented ethnicities in the area. According to a 2005 LAHD survey of 9,113 SRO and residential hotels, the median income of residents was found to be \$4,588.<sup>1</sup> This places the

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<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles Housing Department, August 22, 2005. Report Back on Motion Regarding Preservation of Single Room Occupancy Housing. Los Angeles City Council File 04-2-87.

majority of hotel residents below the 30% mark for “very low income” designated by the Census Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Approximately 45% of the survey’s respondents reported mental illness or disability, and an employment rate of 10%.

As the “social service hub” of southern California, Skid Row is characterized by an unrivaled density of non-profit organizations and public agencies. The historical genesis of this institutional landscape is the subject of later chapters. For now it is sufficient to simply note that a majority of social services are concentrated within three “mega-shelters” – the Los Angeles Mission, the Midnight Mission (figure 4), and the Union Rescue Mission – that together provide nearly 3,000 shelter beds per night and serve over 4,000 meals per day. Combined with the handful of smaller rescue missions and service organizations (figure 5), the neighborhood is home to over 40% of all city shelter beds and over 25% of all county shelter beds (DeVerteuil 2006). The 50 square-blocks of Skid Row as well as the 4.5 miles of the surrounding downtown are patrolled by the 329 officers deployed in LAPD’s Central Division. Of all LAPD divisions, Central Division has the highest concentration of officers per square mile (73), and highest concentration of officers per 1,000 residents (8.2).<sup>2</sup> These numbers increase within the boundaries of Skid Row, which contains the largest portion of Central Division resources, including the block-long, bunker-like Central Division station, located at the corner of Sixth and Maple Streets (figure 6). This location places the station within two blocks of all three mega-shelters and the largest concentration of SRO housing units.

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<sup>2</sup> Compiled from the Official LAPD homepage: [www.lapdonline.org](http://www.lapdonline.org) (YTD 8/22/2009).

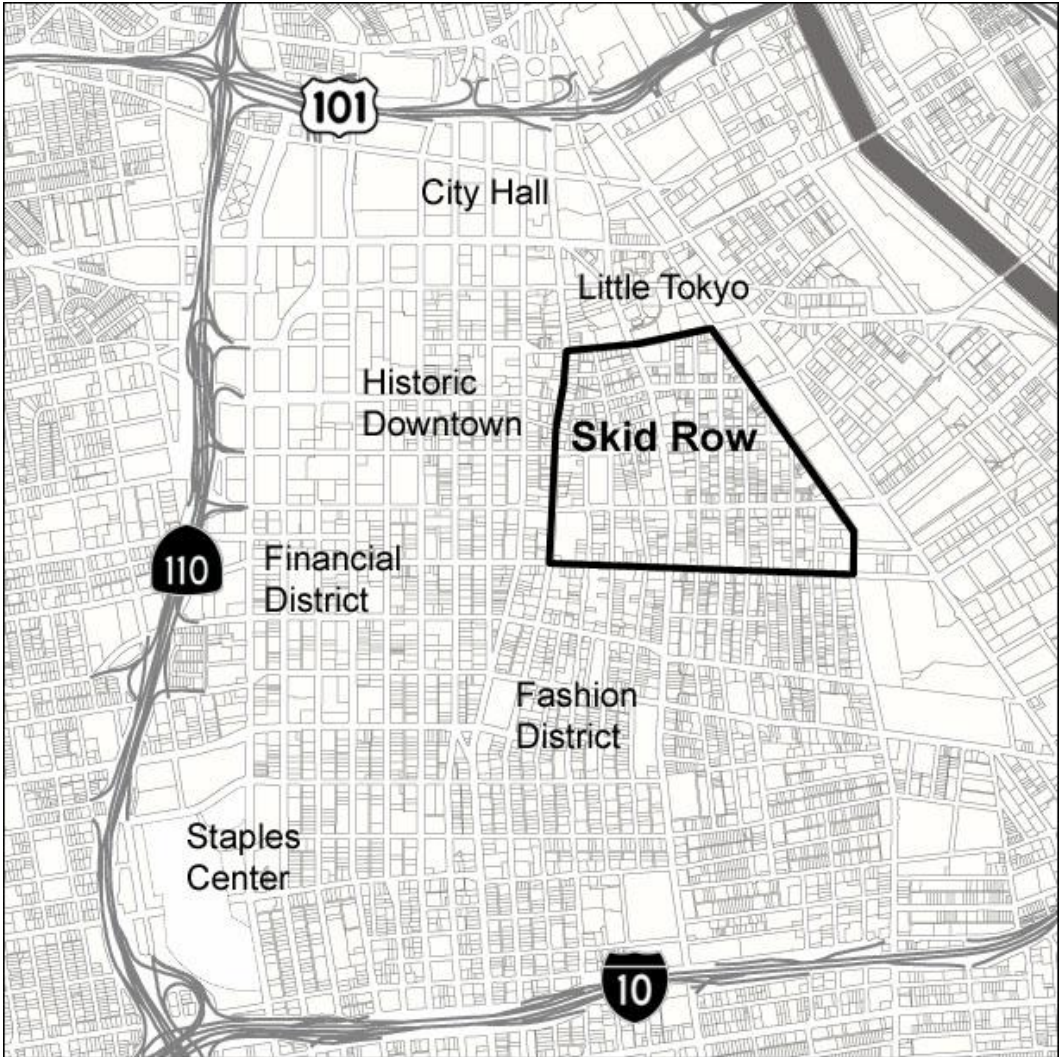


Figure 1. Map of Downtown Los Angeles.

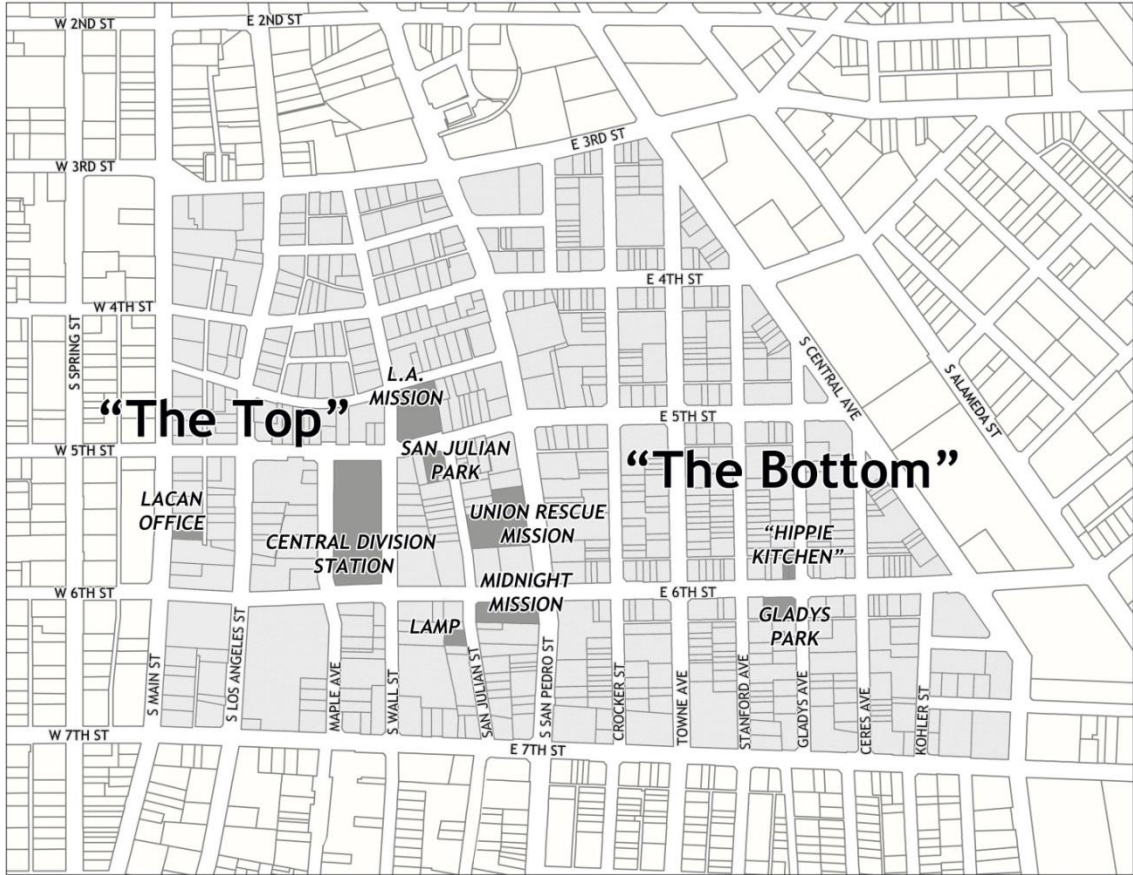


Figure 2. Map of Skid Row.



Figure 3. Skid Row Street Scene (corner of Sixth and San Julian Streets).



Figure 4. Midnight Mission.



Figure 5. The Jonah Project (near the corner of Sixth and San Pedro Streets).



Figure 6. LAPD Central Division Station.



On the other hand, Davis' words highlight the manner in which the *idea* of Skid Row – like “the ghetto” or “the slum” – transcends its geographic and demographic attributes. Without having ventured into the area and often without knowledge of its exact location, many urban residents are readily-equipped with a host of common images – dark and dangerous alleyways; skeleton-like addicts pacing the sidewalks in search of their next fix; homeless wanderers asleep in shadowed corners; grizzly alcoholics huddled close, seeking warmth among trashcan fires. As such, the area has come to occupy a privileged place in the urban imagination, representing the rawest forms of social, economic, and moral delinquency written into both physical and social space (Huey 2007). It is no surprise that the Skid Row district has drawn intense academic interest. Researchers have long considered it a “specialized collecting place – where the residents are seen as pathological and some deviant behavior is the expected norm (Wiseman 1970:65). Classical studies distinguish Skid Row from other parts of the city as “the natural habitat of people who lack the capacities and commitments to live ‘normal’ lives on a sustained basis (Bittner 1967: 705), forming a “community of moral delinquents that stands at the heart of the law, ... living moral exemplars of the dangers that befall those who do not embrace the benefits of industry and moral correctness” (Huey 2007: 25). Thus, how we think about and “deal” with Skid Row says much about how we think about and “deal” with deviance more generally. As a result, Skid Row provides an ideal location in which the fundamental aspects and imperatives of urban social control and policing are most readily observable (Bittner 1967).

Los Angeles' Skid Row in particular occupies an important position in the global proliferation of broken windows and disorder policing. Experimenting with a number of patrol techniques as the head of the New York Police Department in the 1990s, William Bratton is

credited with developing this criminal justice model as a systematic public policy. Hired in 2002 as Los Angeles Police Chief, Bratton chose Skid Row L.A. as a test area before routinizing these patrol techniques to other local areas such as Hollywood and Venice (Winton 2003). During this time, Bratton and other prominent policing consultants across the nation have presented Skid Row as a model for addressing crime and disorder in blighted urban areas. Thus, the historical importance of the Safer Cities Initiative and the questions to which SCI is able to speak – particularly the impacts of policing on marginal urban populations – calls for a more nuanced and comprehensive account of this criminal justice strategy in everyday life.

### **Regulating Urban Marginality**

For the last two decades, commentators have argued that we have experienced a “punitive turn” in urban governance. Theorized under a number of titles – including the “fortress city” (Davis 1990), “revanchist city” (Smith 1996, 2001), “neo-liberal city” (Wacquant 1999, 2009; Herbert and Brown 2006), and “post-justice city” (Mitchell 2003) – these scholars contend that amidst ever-hardening social and economic inequalities, municipalities across the globe are increasingly employing criminal justice, legislative, and architectural strategies in an effort to purify public spaces and enhance order and security. Due to increasing pressures emanating from an entrepreneurial agenda to maximize the profitability of retail spaces, attract mobile capital, regenerate derelict industrial neighborhoods, and provide a boost to the tourism and convention industries, city leaders have embarked on systematic measures to “reclaim” city spaces from the various populations accused of fostering incivility and “stealing” the city from “decent” and “orderly” citizens (Smith 1996; Wacquant 1999; MacLeod 2002).

At the heart of this effort is the adoption of “broken windows” and “disorder” policing techniques. It is difficult to imagine an idea in urban sociology and criminology that has been more successful in crossing the divide from academia into public policy and “common sense” in the last fifty years than the broken windows theory. Championed as a “revolution in American policing” (Nifong 1997: 1), the idea’s initial formulation – as a short, 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* essay by George Kelling and James Q. Wilson – has been referred to as the “bible of policing” (Cullen 1997: 12). The argument underpinning the theory is now well-rehearsed: serious crime can be drastically reduced by aggressively targeting minor forms of disorder and incivilities. Wilson and Kelling (1982) rested their claims on the analogy of a broken window. If a building’s broken window is not repaired, other windows will quickly be broken. In time, the rest of the building, the street, and eventually the entire area will deteriorate. The human equivalent of the broken window, they argued, is “panhandling, street prostitution, drunkenness and public drinking...obstruction of streets and public spaces...unlicensed vending and peddling...and other such acts” (Kelling and Coles 1996: 15). If left unchecked, the theory predicts that these behaviors will cause “decent” citizens to withdraw from the community, weaken informal social controls, and ultimately create the conditions in which crime and criminals are able to flourish. The theory thus calls for a fundamental reorientation of policing in which departments target misdemeanors and infractions as aggressively as they do felonies.

Since its first articulation, the broken windows thesis has produced a steady wave of sociological and criminological research. A vast majority of this scholarship has aimed to unpack the theory’s underlying premises. Research has overwhelmingly attempted to assess the statistical correlation purported to exist between (the policing of) disorder and (resulting reductions in) crime (see Skogan 1990; Harcourt 2001; Kelling and Sousa 2001). A large

proportion of this work has found only modest, if any support for the thesis (see especially Harcourt 2001; Harcourt and Ludwig 2006). A test of the effects of broken windows policing on crime in Los Angeles' Skid Row has produced similarly lacking results. In a 2008 study, UCLA Law professor Gary Blasi and I compared the frequency of Part I offenses occurring in Skid Row, where the Safer Cities Initiative was deployed, with the frequency of Part I offenses occurring in the remainder of Central Division that was not targeted by the policy. Doing so, we found no statistically significant relationship between the Safer Cities Initiative and reductions in overall rates of serious crime (table 1 and figure 7).

Table 1. All Part I Crimes by Area and Time, Central Division, One-Year Before and After Implementation of SCI in September 2006.

Area	Time		Total
	Before	After	
Skid Row (SCI)	1,808 34.20%	1,251 32.60%	3,059 33.53%
Non-SCI Area	3,479 65.80%	2,586 67.40%	6,065 66.47%
Total	5,287	3,837	9,124

Pearson's Chi-Square,  $p > .05$

(Chi-square=2.53, DF=1,  $p = .111$ )

Source: LAPD Dataset

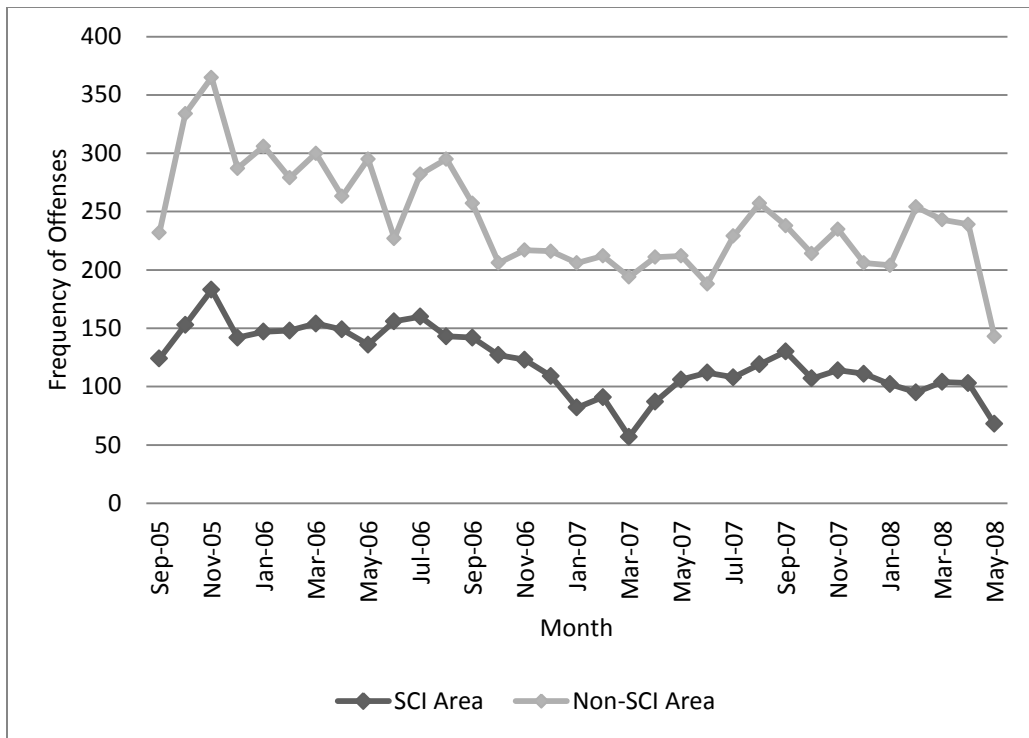


Figure 7. All Part I Crimes by Month,  
Central Division, September 2005 - May 2008

Its empirical debunking notwithstanding, the theory has achieved talismanic status among municipal leaders and police practitioners across the globe. In explaining its resilience and durability, urban sociologists, geographers, social control theorists, and poverty researchers have argued that, in actuality, the policies undergirded by the theory may only be superficially concerned with reductions in crime. More than simply a revision in policing tactics, the Safer Cities Initiative, and its counterparts now in effect from Los Angeles to London to Sydney, represent a transformation in the regulation of marginal urban populations. The intense focus on disorder and low level offenses thus signals an effort of what Jonathan Simon (2007) has referred to as “governing through crime” – a process whereby the technologies, discourses, and metaphors of criminal justice are deployed to legitimate interventions that have other motivations

and open up new opportunities for governance. The broken windows paradigm gives municipalities a new method of addressing a range of social problems, from prostitution to graffiti to young men idly hanging out on the corner. Rather than addressing such “urban ills” as symptoms of larger structural concerns, the new trends in social control have transformed these issues into a law enforcement problem of maintaining order (Vitale 2008).

For a number of scholars, the emergence of order maintenance as social policy coincides with the decline of the rehabilitative ideal in crime control and punishment. According to Feeley and Simon (1992) and others (see Grattet 2011 for a review), social control strategies are increasingly shifting away from a “disciplinary regime” – founded upon the diagnostic and clinical normalization of the individual offender – toward a “regulatory regime” that is more managerial in nature. According to this argument, a majority of effort and resources are now directed toward the *effects* of crime rather than the *causes* of crime. Thus, instead of attempting to “correct” or “cure” deviant groups, these scholars contend, contemporary social control strategies simply attempt to manage the risks these groups pose to “mainstream” society. These strategies are seen as more than happy to settle for broken citizens, so long as their behaviors are kept at acceptable levels and contained within approved spatial boundaries.

Yet, as an increasing number of commentators have begun to point out, the overwhelming focus of current research on both the punitive and managerial character of recent policing trends has obscured the presence of other social control aims that may combine with, and even supersede spatial restrictions, exclusion, and extermination (see Harcourt 2001; MacLeod 2002; DeVerteuil 2006; DeVerteuil *et al.* 2009a; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010). What is required is a far more nuanced and differentiated approach that is sensitive to the diverse forms by which broken windows policing is implemented by street level actors. As Johnsen and

Fitzpatrick (2010) find, the existing literature is “restricted almost exclusively to a critique of the *politics* and *principles* underpinning the punitive turn, rather than any in-depth exploration of its articulation (and contestation) via individuals and agencies ‘on the ground’” (1075, emphasis original). Case in point, in 2010 the journal *Criminology and Public Policy* devoted seven articles of one of its quarterly issues to an assessment and discussion of the Safer Cities Initiative in Skid Row. While a number of the rhetorical critiques are compelling, it is readily evident that not one of the authors has based their arguments on first-hand observations of actual officer behavior or conditions in the neighborhood. Thus, despite explicitly acknowledging the importance of examining exactly *how* broken windows and disorder policing programs are implemented, the discussion remains limited to speculations on how such policies are supposed to work, in theory alone.

One of the primary aims of this research, then, is to provide a detailed empirical account of what officers engaged in this form of policing *actually* do, analyzing what kinds of behaviors they target in which contexts, what constitutes a “broken window” in practice, and what steps officers take to “fix” neighborhood conditions and maintain order. A central argument of the dissertation is that once Skid Row policing policies and practices are examined on the ground, we discover a historically unprecedented attempt to “cure” Skid Row denizens. Contemporary interventions have become undergirded by a pervasive therapeutic thrust, designed to transform the population into healthy, responsible, and “normal” citizens.

Following Foucault (1977), I show that these emerging forms of social control are not simply repressive, as much of the literature characterizes them, but also *productive*. The “therapeutic policing” that has developed in Skid Row is meant to stimulate conduct just as much or more than it is intended to stop it. While Skid Row policing is undeniably marked by a

historically unprecedented level of brute force and coercion, these interventions are meant to offer opportunities for those in Skid Row to “choose” to improve themselves. The hope is, as Foucault (1977) put it, that they “internalize the gaze” of officers to become a mass of self-regulating individuals. In this, the police function as “guides” on neighborhood inhabitants’ path to self-realization, improvement, and change (Moore 2007). This disciplinary project corresponds with, and is inseparable from, new ways of understanding and explaining extreme poverty, homelessness, and marginality. Through the LAPD’s systemization of therapeutic policing, the deleterious conditions plaguing Skid Row and its “typical” inhabitants are recast as individual-level problems stemming almost exclusively from addiction, lack of self-control, and incorrect lifestyle choices

### **Responses and Resistance to Policing**

A complete picture of any social control enterprise can only emerge through the incorporation of a bottom-up examination of the responses taken by its targets (Herbert and Beckett 2010). Yet, as already touched upon, recent research on emerging trends in the regulation of urban marginality has been largely confined to aggregated, quantitative, and top-down analyses. The narrow focus on the punitive quality of urban social control also tends to downplay, if not wholly ignore, the agency of those on the receiving end of regulation (DeVerteuil *et al.* 2009b). An additional, though no less central aim of this dissertation, then, is to begin to highlight and examine the reactions of Skid Row inhabitants touched by the Safer Cities Initiative. This task is accomplished through in-depth observations not only of inhabitants’



direct interactions with officers, but also other aspects of their daily lives, occurring “in the shadow” of SCI, in which the influence of the policy is more indirectly felt. Despite the unrivaled saturation of patrol officers and staggering rates of arrest and citation, this approach reveals diverse and important attempts on behalf of those in Skid Row to not only navigate the conditions at the bottom of the social structure, but to resist the omnipresent surveillance, coercive interventions, and rehabilitative mandates of the Safer Cities Initiative.

While Foucault (1977) is at best suggestive of the possibilities of resisting what he conceives of as overwhelming forces of normalization, James Scott (1998) argues that the state’s disciplinary projects are far less total in their reach, and tend to sow the seeds of their own resistance (also see Gilliom 2001). In *Seeing like a State*, Scott (1998) asserts that in order to carry out its various missions of social intervention and design, in its attempt to re-make subjects in its vision, the modern state must produce schematic knowledge about its citizenry. Yet, these forms of knowing and intervening necessarily rely upon a narrowing of vision, focusing and acting upon only a small and select cluster of characteristics. As a result, “these state simplifications, like all state simplifications, are always far more static than the actual social phenomenon they presume to typify” (46). Thus, in the attempt to make subjects more “legible” and conducive to its discipline, state programs like the Safer Cities Initiative greatly oversimplify the complex social realities at work in Skid Row or any other neighborhood. This generates conditions ripe for conflict and contestation.

A bottom-up examination demonstrates that Skid Row inhabitants engage in a consistent pattern of oppositional activities that ultimately serve to undermine the long-term success of the Safer Cities Initiative and its associated social control measures. Like the assembly-line worker who intentionally slows production output (Thompson 1983), or the welfare recipient who seeks

informal sources of income (Gilliom 2001), Skid Row inhabitants rely on more meaningful and tried local knowledge and practices – the very aspects of Skid Row social life that policing readily glosses over and attempts to overrun – to accomplish their desired goals in the face of police intervention. In an earlier work, Scott (1985:29) conceived of these diffuse and quiet acts of contestation as “everyday forms” of resistance – “the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth.”

Given the therapeutic underpinnings of Skid Row policing, my investigation into inhabitants’ everyday forms of resistance begins with a consideration of how individuals and groups develop alternative projects of self-help and rehabilitation that are more in line with their biographies, pre-existing dispositions, and daily interactions with the immediate social and physical environment of the neighborhood. While not undertaken as conscious and intentional opposition to the dictates of policing, these indigenous models of recovery nonetheless serve to undermine the official, acceptable means of rehabilitation as enforced by Skid Row officers. Creating a therapeutic milieu outside of the spaces “chosen” for them by Skid Row authorities, these individuals have developed a means of renegotiating their marginal status and assigned identities.

Continuing with this bottom-up approach, I turn attention from an unconscious undermining of the broader disciplinary project to consider more directed acts of defiance and subversion taken up in the face of impromptu and unexpected police sanction to secure an economic livelihood. In constructing this account, I consider how the oversimplified though homogenizing portrait of Skid Row and its population can become a vital engine of everyday resistance, utilized as a powerful “weapon of the weak.” I show that through multiple

interactions with officers, Skid Row inhabitants have learned to appropriate officers' narrow, synoptic view of the neighborhood in such a way that enables them to manipulate their own outward appearances, thereby deflecting police scrutiny and evading future coercive interventions – a strategic practice I term “seeing like a cop.” Both of these forms of everyday resistance serve, at least temporarily, to neutralize the disciplinary aims of police. As a result, while inhabitants, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships are certainly being transformed, they are not necessarily being transformed in the ways intended by the agents of formal social control.

Shedding light on the everyday contours of resistance represents an important step in elevating populations like those inhabiting Skid Row beyond their current portrayal as hapless and homogenous victims of emerging punitive policies. Yet, while the practices I document represent tangible, even if small victories – securing autonomy, sobriety, income, and a worthy sense of self – we must take seriously Scott's (1985) warnings to avoid over-romanticizing. These everyday forms of resistance were neither designed nor taken up in order to amend, reform, or abolish the current model of Skid Row policing bearing down on those in the neighborhood. Nor are these practices capable of bringing about such large-scale changes. This broader goal requires that marginal populations engage in more organized, formal modes of resistance. But this is no easy feat. Urban sociologists studying neighborhood social organization have long held impoverished neighborhoods tend to have dramatically lowered levels of participation in the kinds of voluntary associations and community-based organizations believed to bolster collective efforts to address common concerns, from housing, to schooling, to policing and public safety (see Shaw and McKay 1942; Sampson 2012).

The stigma attached to residing in neighborhood like Skid Row – widely-associated with social failure, destitution, and crime – presents a significant obstacle that inhabitants must overcome in any attempt to establish the levels of solidarity required to engage in organized resistance. For Wacquant (2008: 169), this “territorial stigma” is “arguably the single most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those entrapped in these sulfurous zones.” This taint of place was not lost on Skid Row researchers who studied the neighborhood throughout the twentieth century. As Howard M. Bahr (1973: 287) stated in his book, *Skid Row: An Introduction to Disaffiliation*, “The primary problem of the Skid Row man...is that the combined weight of stigmatization which accompanies many different kinds of defectiveness is focused upon a few men in a distinctive neighborhood.” As a result, those in Skid Row “must fight a continual, desperate battle to maintain enough self-esteem to live.” This spatialized stigma “encourages amongst residents sociofugal strategies of mutual avoidance and distancing which exacerbate processes of social fission, feed interpersonal mistrust, and undermine the sense of collectivity necessary to engage in community-building and collective action” (Wacquant 2008: 30).

Despite the polarizing conditions of contemporary Skid Row, during the course of my fieldwork I discovered that inhabitants have nonetheless managed to come together to mount significant formal opposition to the Safer Cities Initiative, and have even begun to effect marked reforms in policing policy and practices. A final aim of my bottom-up examination is to better understand how Skid Row inhabitants have managed to overcome the territorial stigma theorized to preclude such collective and effective acts of resistance. I find that whereas the more individualized, dispersed forms of everyday resistance tend to accept and even perpetuate Skid Row’s territorial stigma, more organized forms of resistance have explicitly aimed to re-frame

and supplant that stigma as an integral part of any effort to challenge policing. In short, how inhabitants manage Skid Row's territorial stigma is closely connected to the forms of resistance they ultimately take up.

This leads to an overarching theme running throughout the entire dissertation. That the Safer Cities Initiative and other aggressive broken windows policing programs have not produced significant effects on criminal offending does not necessarily mean that such policies are not having an important impact on seemingly-unrelated facets of social life in Skid Row and other distressed neighborhoods. Far from it. Through these "spill-over effects", policing has the capacity to intimately shape the conditions that Skid Row inhabitants encounter every day, constraining or facilitating the manner in which these individuals come to understand themselves, their peers, and their community.

## **Method**

The pressing need for this kind of analysis became evident to me shortly after I began intensive fieldwork on the streets of Skid Row in January 2007, three months following the official launch of SCI. I first ventured into the neighborhood as part of an ethnographic methodology practicum at UCLA, taught at the time by Stefan Timmermans and Jack Katz. While I had read a number of *Los Angeles Times* articles detailing the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative, policing was by no means my central focus when I began my research. My original aim was to conduct a study of homeless survival strategies, inspired by the collection of disheveled street vendors that lined the neighborhood sidewalks hocking an assortment of found,

scavenged, and stolen items, as well as pirated DVDS, books, clothing, and individual cigarettes – referred to locally as “loosies”.

Policing became the explicit focal point of my fieldwork late one evening, following my first significant interaction with Skid Row officers. While standing on a corner observing several of the vendors’ transactions and jotting field notes into a small notebook, I was forcibly detained, searched, interrogated, and ordered to “clear out of the area” by two LAPD officers. According to the officers, I “fit the description” of someone reported to be distributing narcotics. While I was certainly able to follow the officers’ orders and leave the neighborhood that night, the interaction made me wonder what the omnipresence and aggressiveness of Skid Row policing meant for the neighborhood’s inhabitants that could not so easily escape officers’ coercive interventions, for whom these kinds of episodes had become a routine part of existence. This curiosity began to inform my fieldwork, leading me to develop what became a five year ethnographic study.

Much in the long tradition of urban ethnographies, my principle approach was to become immersed with those living and working in Skid Row as they negotiated their daily lives (Duneier 1999; Venkatesh 2006; Gowan 2010). I continued to research street vending and other groups that assembled along the sidewalk, but I also began to concentrate fieldwork on Skid Row officers. During my detainment, the officers informed me that if I had any complaints or concerns that I should contact one of the area’s two senior lead officer (SLO). Under the Safer Cities Initiative, SLOs serve as “community liaisons,” patrolling the area primarily to make referrals to social services rather than make arrests. I took the officers’ advice, and making contact with the SLOs proved easy. The two officers were highly visible, and could be found along the same few blocks day in and day out. Additionally, they were the only officers that

spent more time walking the neighborhood than in their squad cars. For the remainder of 2007, I supplemented my fieldwork alongside the vendors with conversations and observations alongside the SLOs, gaining the police perspective of life in the area. Beginning in early 2008, I began concentrated fieldwork observing daily patrols and narcotics busts as well as meeting with Central Division leadership, parole officers, and prosecutors from the City Attorney's office. I also began attending a range of LAPD meetings and forums that were open to the public. This most notably included Central Division's monthly "public safety walk" and "community-impact meetings" in which Skid Row inhabitants and stakeholders were given the opportunity to voice their concerns about crime and policing in the neighborhood. For the most part, LAPD officers and their law enforcement partners were incredibly forthcoming in response to my constant requests for information. I attribute much of this openness to the role of academics in the design, implication, and "marketing" of the Safer Cities Initiative, an involvement that I consider in more detail later in the dissertation.

During this time I also initiated research on the Los Angeles Community Action (LACAN), a grassroots organization constituting the most active opposition to the current policing policies and practices. I first approached LACAN in May of 2008. Much to my surprise, unlike my experiences with the LAPD, LACAN was highly suspicious of my intentions. From my initial discussions with organizational staff and leadership, I was informed that I would only be allowed to research their ongoing efforts in exchange for performing manual, clerical, and research-oriented work, drawing mostly from my background in sociology and criminology. As part of this, under the guidance of the organization's lead civil-rights organizer, "Commander Malcolm," I completed the training program necessary to accompany and participate on "Community Watch". Community Watch is a daily patrol of Skid Row, where LACAN staff and

volunteers video tape police interactions with residents for use in civil litigation, criminal defense, and media campaigns. Soon after completing the training I traded minor roles with other team members, and eventually settled in the role of videographer. But Community Watch did more than give me an additional opportunity to observe police behavior and exchanges. After only a few weeks patrolling the neighborhood alongside LACAN, I began to meet a range of inhabitants that would have been difficult had I approached them on my own. For many in the neighborhood, involvement with the organization served to “vouch” for my trustworthiness as I developed close relationships with a number of neighborhood groups. Over several months, my role in LACAN grew beyond my responsibilities on Community Watch. I joined LACAN in weekly staff meetings, meetings with outside agencies, community outreach, and general organizing around civil rights and housing issues. This access provided insights to the larger context of ongoing legal struggles, for which video evidence was being collected, as well as access to other groups and organizational actors operating in Skid Row.

On a practical level, my concern with multiple neighborhood actors meant that my time was often divided between multiple “sub-sites.” On a representative day in 2009, for instance, I began fieldwork at 9:00am at the LACAN office, attending a meeting with tenants regarding recent SRO hotel evictions. Afterward, I conducted an in-depth interview with a neighborhood resident who had recently joined the Community Watch Team. Just before noon, I walked the three blocks to San Julian Park to play a game of chess with one of the street vendors, after which I sat on the corner for several hours observing as he tended to his sidewalk shop. In the afternoon, I walked to the Central Division Station to attend a community policing meeting, stopping to observe two police detainments and speak with the officers once they released their suspects.



A major advantage to this approach was that it allowed me to gain multiple perspectives regarding a single event or occurrence as it unfolded in real time. I was able to “triangulate” many of my findings, which often led to the development of additional research questions and refinement of hypotheses. For instance, in 2010, Central Division leadership instituted a campaign to ban charitable giveaways along the street, in which church and other voluntary groups provided free food, clothing, and other resources along Skid Row’s streets. I was able to quickly learn the material impact and interpreted meanings of this policy decision for a range of neighborhood inhabitants, from individuals who relied on these resources for everyday survival on the street to street vendors who resold the items to supplement their welfare payments to the organizations that provided these goods and opposed police regulation.

Despite these advantages, there were certainly some drawbacks to this approach. Given the proximity and visibility of the various peer groups, organizations, and agencies in Skid Row, many of my informants observed me conducting fieldwork alongside those parties with whom they had antagonistic relationships. For instance, I encountered several LAPD officers, with whom I had had a number of conversations, as I accompanied LACAN on its Community Watch patrols. Officers’ responses to this were mixed and often changed over time. While some officers relayed to me that they saw my actions as an attempt to more fully understand all of the dynamics of Skid Row life, others expressed feelings of betrayal, that I had abandoned their “side” to join the opposition. Some of these officers began to refuse my requests to further discuss Skid Row policing. Others, however, increased their openness, inviting me for additional interviews, ride-alongs, “walk-alongs”, and access to officer trainings. At some times it seemed as though these were concerted attempts to win me over to their position. At other times, they explicitly enlisted me to “take the truth back to LACAN.”

Conversely, I confronted occasional moments of anxiety on the part of inhabitants and various organizational staff members who observed me speaking with and accompanying Skid Row officers throughout the neighborhood. As I detail in further length in later chapters, my access often depended on successfully convincing Skid Row residents that I was not an undercover officer. My association and clear familiarity with Central Division personnel did not help in this. Over time, however, these suspicions seemed to relax as I spent additional time sharing quite intimate moments with my informants.

Overall, I am confident that the analytical opportunities and benefits brought about by this approach far outweigh the complications that I sometimes encountered. Rather than avoid the tensions that arose between various Skid Row actors, I have made illuminating the dynamics of these conflicts a central concern of my analysis, which has allowed me to better examine the role of policing as part of the intensely-contested character of Skid Row.

Throughout my five years of fieldwork – from January 2007 to January 2012 – I utilized a modified grounded theory approach (Timmermans and Tavory 2007). Observations were typically recorded in a stepwise fashion as advanced by Snow and Anderson (1987). This consisted of making mental and jotted notes in the field, and then typing and expanding jottings in detailed and extensive field narratives following each day's observations. After transcribing my notes, I composed short analytical memos regarding themes, concerns, or general curiosities that arose. I pressed myself to formulate hypotheses about the social phenomena that I had observed, giving myself "marching orders" – as Jack Katz once referred to them – to find ways of testing these hypotheses when I travelled to Skid Row the next day. Utilizing this form of theoretical sampling, I sharpened research questions and honed my foci of inquiry, consulting the relevant social scientific literature while collecting multiple "cases" from which I could isolate

axes of difference and better explain the variance I observed. I supplemented this ethnographic data with over 15,000 pages of public records provided under the California Public Records Act provided by the LAPD, City Hall, Office of the City Attorney, and neighborhood service organizations, acquired in a series of earlier research projects (Blasi 2007; Blasi and Stuart 2008). These records included email correspondences, meeting minutes, internal memoranda, administrative procedures, and financial records. Besides providing invaluable historical and organizational-level data, these private and “back stage” conversations allowed me to better adjudicate the veracity of more public and “front stage” statements and actions that I encountered during fieldwork.

Almost all the names of individuals appearing throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms. Not only was this necessary for the approval of my university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), but it was often requested of me by my informants. Many of the Skid Row inhabitants involved in this research had, and continue to have, tenuous legal entanglements, as well as involvement in illicit activities. Many feared retaliation by officers in the event that my research made them too readily identifiable. To allay these concerns, I have made some occasional changes to intimate identifying details. As part of this effort, I have also avoided using officers’ real names wherever possible. I make two exceptions to anonymity: First, for those individuals whose names appear in mass publications like newspapers and city records, which I cite; and second, for any city agency, business association, Skid Row organization, and their public representatives.

## **Outline of the Dissertation**

The structure of the dissertation reflects an effort to examine Skid Row policing through the multiple and often conflicting perspectives held by neighborhood actors. The chapters are organized into two parts. Part I observes policing primarily through the lens of the authorities charged with its official regulation. Chapter One provides the historical foregrounding necessary for the ethnography that follows by looking at the therapeutic quality of Skid Row policing and asking: “how did we get here?” I show that over the course of Skid Row’s development as a geographically-distinct and symbolically-charged neighborhood, Skid Row police formed a symbiotic partnership with an influx of “mega-shelters” that prioritize the intensive rehabilitation of the neighborhood population. Through their increasing collaborations, the partnership aims to cement Skid Row as a “recovery zone” in which they work together to transform and reintegrate Skid Row denizens as healthy, productive members of society. Chapter Two moves from the historical and organizational level to follow officers out into the streets of Skid Row as they carry out this task. Here I am concerned with how officers mobilize the coercive resources available to them – specifically quality-of-life laws and the broken windows patrol model – to compel inhabitants to undertake more appropriate lifestyle choices by seeking rehabilitative opportunities at partner organizations. I explore the contours of this new police role – acting as “recovery managers” – as well as the implications of this brand of therapeutic policing for cultural understandings of the social issues associated with extreme poverty including drug addiction and crime. In order to better specify what truly is “new” about this approach, I have structured the chapter as an ethnographic revisit to the Skid Row policing characteristic of the mid-twentieth century, as most famously described in the work of Egon Bittner (1967).

Part II reverses this perspective, examining social control measures through the lens of Skid Row inhabitants, like Darryl, to consider how these individuals come to understand

neighborhood life and react to the policing that they encounter. Each of the three chapters can be seen as ethnographic case studies of a number of the groups that are considered among the quintessential examples of “human broken windows” – homeless, loiterers, addicts, unlicensed vendors and peddlers – as outlined by the broken windows theory. Each chapter also considers attempts by neighborhood inhabitants to address issues such as homelessness, unemployment, and drug addiction in ways that diverge from, and contest, the normative vision of Skid Row and its population enforced by officers. Chapter Three examines the lives of a group of parolees and probationers who attempt to appropriate public space along the neighborhood’s sidewalks in order to engage in an exercise-based project of drug recovery. Here I am concerned with how the group sustains sobriety, preferred conceptions of self, and supportive peer networks as an indigenous alternative to the coercive therapeutics impressed upon them by the police and their mega-shelter partners. Chapter Four illuminates the social world of illegal street vendors. I focus on the processes by which one group of vendors develops informal measures of regulation, in spite of, and in contradiction to formal police regulation, in order to better control the nearby street life that impacts their economic livelihood and tenuous legal statuses. Chapter Five takes up a topic that has received little systematic attention in the social scientific literature: how members of marginalized urban communities organize to formally contest the intensive policing that is increasingly cementing itself as a normal aspect of daily life. Following a range of resistance efforts taken up by LACAN, I consider how the organization is able to effectively combat police mistreatment while simultaneously addressing the associated territorial stigma and denigrated social status that accompany residence in Skid Row.

Read in succession, the ethnographic case studies chapters are arranged to account for increasing degrees of resistance to Skid Row policing, moving from quiet avoidance to

subversive adaptation to overt and direct opposition. In this, Chapter Five brings the discussion full circle – leading back into the discussion contained in Chapter One – demonstrating how inhabitants’ acts of resistance contribute to the long-standing historical struggle to define and cement Skid Row as a particular “kind” of neighborhood. While not a community study in the traditional sense, the three in-depth ethnographic cases are intended to take on a mosaic-like quality. Combining in-depth ethnographies of multiple neighborhood groups and sites of social interaction, I hope to provide a glimpse into the larger social world that is Skid Row. The concluding chapter synthesizes the analyses driving each individual chapter and discusses the implications of the findings.

## CHAPTER ONE

### From “Containment Zone” to “Recovery Zone”: Neighborhood Development and Policing in Skid Row

In his article, “Time for New Urban Ethnographies,” Jack Katz (2010: 41) emphatically reminds that “we start participant observation at the current end of a temporal continuum on which the relevant past is elaborately obscured.” Taking Katz’ proposition seriously, this chapter looks to the past to provide a necessary grounding for the ethnographic analysis to come, by tracing the historical processes that led to the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative in Los Angeles’ Skid Row. In doing so, I employ a framework that departs from typical analyses of broken windows and order-maintenance policing policies. I consider the vital role that the local police have played in the historical development of Skid Row as a geographically-distinct and symbolically-charged neighborhood. Using this longer-term approach, I demonstrate that throughout Skid Row’s development, policing policy has been consistently mobilized as part of a struggle between competing local actors as a tool to cement and reproduce a specific neighborhood identity. These actors made conscious attempts to imbue Skid Row with a particular “place character” (Paulsen 2004), thereby sanctioning certain persons, behaviors, and activities as appropriate while castigating others as “out of place.” As the “maintenance men *par excellence*” of the local spatial order (Lofland 1973:90), the local police have consistently provided the coercive power of the law to these actors’ material and symbolic manipulations of urban space.

Thus, rather than narrowly explain the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative and its associated “anti-homeless” measures as the outgrowth of a set of social, political, and economic forces far-removed from the neighborhood context, I focus analysis on the actual behaviors and interactions occurring on the ground. As a result, this approach is far more suited for uncovering why certain policing policies emerge when and where they do. Further, breaking with so-called “revanchist” explanations that privilege growth-minded business interests and government leaders as the (often-sole) driving engine of broken windows policing (see Smith 1996, 1998; Mitchell 1997, 2001), this analysis devotes much-needed attention to the role of social service and other voluntary-sector organizations in this process. The Skid Row case demonstrates the importance of these actors in not only constraining, but also authoring and propagating aggressive forms of policing that scholars have overwhelmingly considered as antithetical to such organizations’ ideals of rehabilitation and reintegration.

After locating Skid Row’s early development within a discussion of “Main Stem” districts that emerged in major urban centers across the United States in the late nineteenth century, I organize the chapter into two sections corresponding to two distinct eras in Skid Row’s historical trajectory. A comparison between the different time periods reveals that during each, a very different coalition of social service organizations was successful in elevating itself as the dominant representative “voice” of the neighborhood and its population. These coalitions were instrumental in inscribing Skid Row with markedly different public identities and, as a result, produced divergent forms of policing that corresponded to their organizational interests, demands, and preferred character of place. In the first period, spanning from approximately 1959 to 1992, the dominant coalition of the time – organized around the Los Angeles Catholic Worker – constructed Skid Row as a stable and residential “containment zone,” characterized by an



intentionally relaxed, tolerant, and “protective” brand of policing policy. By taking a historical approach, show that “the social character stamped onto a neighborhood early in its history is often effaced or reversed by later processes” (Katz 2010:25). From 1992 to 2011, an alternate coalition – organized around a collection of “mega-shelters” – emerged to reconstitute Skid Row as a transitional and instrumental “recovery zone,” distinguished by an unprecedented intensification of policing. Whereas the social service coalition of the containment era maintained an antagonistic (though at times mutually-satisfying) relationship with the local growth machine and criminal justice system, the coalition that emerged during the recovery zone period forged a new dynamic marked by increased collaboration and mutual-dependence. The ensuing launch of the Safer Cities Initiative and other closely related policies were a direct result of this shift in Skid Row’s organizational landscape and dominant spatial order.

To more fully illustrate this transformation and its consequences, I provide a detailed discussion of the evolution of one particular organization, Lamp Community, throughout both historical eras. While Lamp was instrumental in cementing Skid Row’s initial neighborhood identity and largely dictated policing practices throughout the containment period, Lamp was later cast as “out of place” within the spatial order of the recovery zone, becoming a regular target of public criticism and police repression.

### **Los Angeles’s “Main Stem”: 1889-1959**

Throughout its early history, the area that would become known as Los Angeles’ Skid Row closely mirrored the Main Stem (or “Hobohemia”) districts found in other urban centers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Anderson 1923; Hoch and Slayton 1989).

Proximity to the Los Angeles River and a flat topography made the area immediately east of L.A.'s nascent downtown ideal for the development of the packing and shipping industries. When the first locomotive arrived in Los Angeles in 1889, it brought with it a swell of migratory "hobos" seeking jobs in the seasonal agricultural and industrial sectors, as well as introducing a constant flow of engineers, brakemen, and other railway personnel. As a result, in the thirty years spanning from 1870 and 1900, the population of Los Angeles quadrupled, from 5,782 to 102,000 (Blasi et al. 2006). This population boom led to the development of single room occupancy (SRO) hotels – providing small rooms and communal baths at affordable prices – to accommodate the seasonal, short-term residents. Given the primary demographics of the area, it also attracted services that catered to the single adult male population, including bars, pawnshops, brothels, dance halls, inexpensive restaurants, and religious-based missions. The area was also home to a collection of employment agencies, a wealth of labor union organizing, and vibrant political activity (Spivak 1998).

Due to a combination of factors, the Hobohemia era began its wane in the 1920s. The railroad – the lifeblood of the migratory hobo culture – was replaced by the automobile as the major mode of transportation; a shift that was particularly pronounced in Los Angeles. Additionally, the mechanization of agriculture significantly lowered demand for seasonal farm workers, and the American economy slotted increasing numbers of workers into more stable, year-round employment. As evidence of this shift, unskilled, nonfarm labor as a percentage of all employed workers in the U.S. fell from 12.5 in 1900 to 9.4 by 1940, and to 4.8 by 1960 (Hoch and Slayton 1989:89). Given the existing concentration of inexpensive housing, accommodations, and charities, however, the area remained an ideal destination for those migrating westward throughout the 1930s, during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.

Later, during the Second World War, the area served as a temporary home to troops on their way to and from combat in the Pacific, as well as those individuals arriving in L.A. seeking employment in the growing war industries. These conditions remained until the postwar years, when the area underwent its second significant shift. Federal benefits allowed veterans – many of whom were former hobos that had been absorbed by the military during the war – to transition more easily into civilian life and stable employment. In fact, this was the first time in American history in which the end of a war did not increase the homeless population (Snow and Anderson 1993).

It was during this time that the Main Stem districts across the country first became referred to as “Skid Row,” a far more pejorative, generic term.<sup>3</sup> Changes in the national economy brought about important demographic shifts. With the area no longer functioning as the major urban labor exchange, the hobo, tramp, and “knight of the road” gave way to an older, less mobile, often-disabled population that depended far more heavily on charity (Bogue 1963; Wallace 1965; Hoch and Slayton 1989). Upon a visit to the area, one was likely “to see beggars where rebels once shouted, sang, and whored” (Bendinger, quoted in Snow and Anderson 1993: 15). The size of the L.A.’s Skid Row population was also much smaller than it had been in the prior period (Spivack 1998). With the decline in residents came the closing of businesses, the rise of abandoned property, and the prevalence of “blight.” Physical decay was accompanied by perceptions of social decay. While research has shown that rates of alcohol consumption remained largely constant between the Main Stem and Skid Row periods (Bogue 1963), a

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<sup>3</sup> The term “Skid Row” is actually a 1800s coinage traced back to Seattle, Washington. The term referred to a street that was utilized by the timber industry to slide felled logs to the waterfront for shipment. Known alternatively as “Skid Road” at the time, the adjacent area was characterized by flop houses and transients. The term came to be applied to many inner city districts that exhibited similar residential and demographic characteristics (Blasi et al. 2006).

general, negative stereotype emerged of the Skid Row resident as social misfits and alcoholic degenerates. As Hoch and Slayton (1989) argue, popular media accounts were only bolstered by academics who focused the bulk of Skid Row research on alcohol-related problems – example of this work include Spradley’s (1970) *You Owe Yourself a Drunk*; Wiseman’s (1970) *Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics*; Blumberg et al.’s (1973) *Liquor and Poverty: Skid Row as a Human Condition*; Bahr and Caplow’s (1974) *Old Men: Drunk and Sober*.

The spread of this new, mostly deviant image of Skid Row and its population was connected to a parallel trend occurring during the time, namely the mounting pressure for urban renewal and downtown redevelopment. In accordance with policies of slum clearance emerging from the Federal Housing Act of 1949 – which paired federal funds with the local power of eminent domain – municipal redevelopment agencies partnered with local business elites to carry out wholesale clearances of the country’s major Skid Row districts (Miller 1982). The transformation of Chicago’s West Madison Skid Row, the setting for Nels Anderson’s classic study, *The Hobo*, is emblematic of this process. Single-room units in the area decreased from 4,529 in 1960 to 672 in 1980. Equating to a loss of roughly 85% of the remaining private low-income housing in the city, thousands of residents were displaced, many of which were forced to begin living on the streets (Hoch and Slayton 1989: 120-121).

This time period also proved to be a critical juncture in the history of L.A.’s Skid Row and, as I will demonstrate in the following sections, key events and decisions that occurred at this moment sowed the seeds for the aggressive form of order-maintenance policing that characterizes the neighborhood today.

### **Skid Row as a “Containment Zone”: 1959-1992**

At the same time that SRO districts across the United States were being bulldozed, L.A.'s Skid Row – known locally at the time as “the Nickel” – departed along a markedly different trajectory. As I will detail, this divergence was the result of the efforts of a coalition of progressive, community-based and legal organizations that were successful in not only preserving the area in the face of aggressive downtown development, but also in *amplifying* and *solidifying* the Nickel as the region's “community of last resort” and the rightful “home” for the down-and-out. Through their actions, the coalition successfully forged a new neighborhood identity and overwhelmingly dictated the form that policing in the area would take for roughly thirty years.

As was the case in many other major US cities, by the 1950s Los Angeles' downtown had become a secondary and declining commercial and industrial zone, with economic activity moving eastward to the Hollywood and Wilshire Corridor areas. A height limit ordinance – prohibiting the construction of buildings over thirteen stories (150 feet) – further prevented the city from developing the iconic skylines that characterized rival urban centers. In 1959, these height restrictions were abolished, propelling downtown into an era of accelerated reinvestment. Los Angeles quickly emerges as the “archetype” of postwar urban restructuring (Beauregard 1991). In just ten years, downtown Los Angeles became one of the top destinations for multinational corporations, moving from ninth to fifth on the list of corporate headquarter cities (Haas and Heskin 1981). With a new proprietary stake in luring mobile capital to their new home, financial interests joined with merchants to form the Downtown Business Men's Association – later renamed the Central City Association (CCA) – to exert their influence over downtown's built environment. Singled out as the number one obstacle to a “downtown

revitalization,” these business interests set their sights on the elimination of Skid Row. Through the 1950s and 1960s, their efforts were successful, though largely piecemeal. For instance, the CCA was able to lobby the city to shut down problematic bars and demolish Skid Row buildings that were in violation of seismic code, quickly eliminating 20% of the housing stock (Haas and Heskin 1981).

In 1969 the CCA developed a more comprehensive plan for Skid Row’s future, with the formation of the Committee for Central City Planning, comprised of 22 executives from the largest downtown property owners and businesses. In 1972 the committee produced a planning document called “The Silverbook Plan” – informally named for its metallic-colored cover. The Silverbook slated Skid Row for complete demolition, to be rebuilt and renamed as “Central City East.” The area would provide a home to a new regional university center, a central library, a metropolitan police station, massive parking garages, and a people mover (Herbert 1971; Community Redevelopment Agency 1975). Supported strongly by city council, the project would be carried out by the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), and funded through the CRA’s “tax increment financing” – an arrangement whereby a portion of the city’s tax revenues in redevelopment zones are diverted directly to the CRA budget for use in further redevelopment.

Within a short period, however, a copy of the Silverbook Plan made its way into the hands of two of the founding members of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris. From the time of its founding in 1970 as part of the lay Catholic movement (see Miller 1973), the L.A. Catholic Worker has operated a small Skid Row soup kitchen, known locally as the “Hippie Kitchen.” Reviewing the designs for the neighborhood, Dietrich and Morris discovered that, if carried out, the city’s plan would wholly eliminate their soup kitchen

and its regular patrons, and, most importantly, it would displace the entirety of the neighborhood's current residents. Working with urban planners from the Los Angeles Community Design Center (LACDC) – a progressive organization that designs, develops, and preserves affordable housing – lawyers from the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) – an organization providing civil legal services to low-income citizens – and sympathetic leaders in government and business – including later-CRA Chair James M. Wood and Frank Rice, an executive of Bullock's department store – the Catholic Worker authored an alternative plan. The "Blue Book," or "Community Plan," as it came to be called, proposed an opposite fate for Skid Row. Rather than raze the neighborhood, the Catholic Worker called on the city to take major steps in stabilizing affordable housing and social services in the area; to ultimately reconsider and redesign the neighborhood as a viable residential, though extremely low-income community. Despite the influence and savvy of their supporters, the Catholic Worker anticipated that swaying the opposition to re-envision Skid Row in this manner would be no easy task.

To this end, the coalition devised a rather unorthodox strategy. They elected to *embrace* the perception that Skid Row was the number one obstacle to downtown revitalization in an effort to take advantage of the strong NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) sentiments that existed throughout city hall and among downtown business interests. This required that they consciously delineate the physical boundaries and social characteristics of the neighborhood and its population. As Dietrich recalls:

If you had asked someone in the 1970s to point on a map and show you Skid Row, they would have probably just said "All of downtown!" It definitely had a more spread out feeling. So we decided to sit down and just draw it on a map, and

really highlight it. Our thinking was that the more we called one particular area “Skid Row,” the better it would be for us. At the same time, we also wanted to really play on this ugly image that everyone had of Skid Row. We wanted to keep Skid Row scary. When it’s scary, middle class white people don’t really show much interest in it anymore. They just don’t want to be around it. Developers won’t want it as much. When it’s scary it’s not as contested of a space. We started meeting with people and saying, “Look what would happen if you try to clear this out. Look what would happen to downtown.”<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic Worker and its allies set out to convince the Silverbook’s supporters that, upon demolishing housing and social services, a mass of extremely impoverished and homeless individuals would follow facilities like the Hippie Kitchen to wherever they relocated, whether to elsewhere in downtown or into more well-to-do areas. This strategy produced swift results, and ultimately eroded the enthusiasm for Skid Row’s demolition. Warnings of the consequences of displacement were particularly effective in swaying city councilmembers who were fearful that physical clearance would eventually transform their own districts into the new Skid Row (Haas and Heskin 1981). Within months, Mayor Tom Bradley appointed a Blue Ribbon Citizens’ Advisory Committee to incorporate the Catholic Worker’s ideas alongside those of downtown businesses, the redevelopment agency, and the police department.

Finalized as the “1976 Containment Plan,” the new design for Skid Row advanced a compromise that satisfied each of the parties involved. First, the fifty square blocks of eastern downtown identified by the Catholic Worker’s counter-plan – between Third and Seventh

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Jeff Dietrich, Catherine Morris, and Catholic Worker members, March 4, 2011.



Streets, bounded by Main Street on the west and Central Street on the east – were officially designated as L.A.’s Skid Row. The city would concentrate and improve low-income housing within these boundaries. Social services – including shelters, rescue missions, and soup kitchens – as well as amenities – including benches, restrooms, and parks – would be relocated from other areas of the city to within Skid Row. This “containment area” would thus act as a “magnet,” attracting the city’s homeless and low-income populations. The compromise was equally satisfying for business and city leaders due to an alternate, though intertwined dimension. Low-income housing outside of Skid Row’s confines would be discouraged through a deliberate control of the housing stock. The plan simultaneously called for the construction of “buffers” to “reinforce the edges between Skid Row and other land uses” (LACDC 1976c: 7). Light industrial development would be encouraged along Skid Row’s borders, while downtown’s physical environment would be “hardened” (see Jeffery 1977), through measures such as the locking of trashcans or increasing the brightness of streetlights in areas formerly utilized by homeless individuals for sleeping. If designed successfully, the plan argued, “When the Skid Row resident enters the buffer, the psychological discomfort of the familiar Skid Row environment will be lost; he will not be inclined to travel far from the area of containment” (LACDC 1967c: 12). In this manner, Skid Row would remain intact, but its “area of influence” would be significantly decreased (see figures 1 and 2).

**skid row tomorrow with social programs and no containment policy**



Figure 8. Skid Row's Effect on Downtown without Proposed Containment Plan (LACDC 1976c: 6).

**skid row tomorrow with social programs and containment policy**

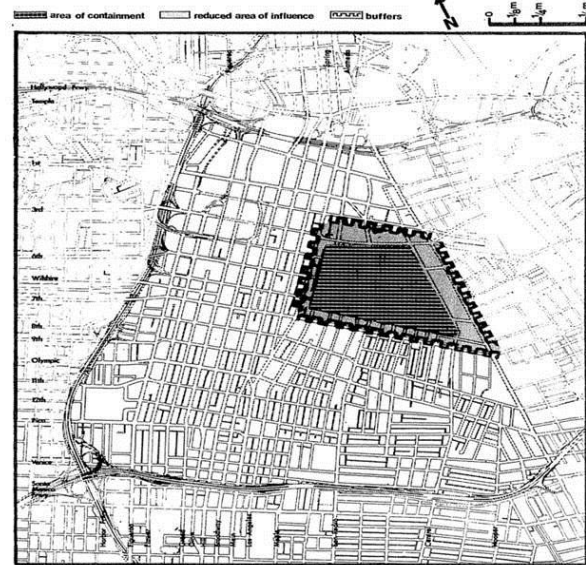


Figure 9. Skid Row's Effect on Downtown under the Proposed Containment Plan (LACDC 1976c: 7).

Thus, while Skid Row had maintained a rather geographically-blurred character throughout its early history, through the efforts of the Catholic Worker and its ally organizations Skid Row became a geographically-defined, sanctified neighborhood; described concisely in the 1976 plan as “a place where the Skid Row resident can call ‘home’” (LACDC 1976a: 6-7). To protect the area against future attempts to clear it off the map, the Catholic Worker coalition took concerted actions in the subsequent years that further recognize Skid Row as a legitimate residential community. The group formed (and strategically named) several organizations to accelerate the neighborhood’s physical transformation and symbolic re-branding. In 1978, the group formed the Skid Row Development Corporation (SRDC), a non-profit corporation funded by the CRA to become the official “developer-protector” of the neighborhood (Haas and Heskin 1981). Under Catholic Worker leadership, the SRDC obtained over \$3 million in local and federal grants in its first three years to construct new housing for Skid Row’s impoverished residents. This momentum led to the creation of two additional housing development organizations, the Single Room Occupancy Corporation in 1984 and the Skid Row Housing Trust in 1989. Both organizations were funded through the CRA for the explicit purpose of rehabilitating the area’s crumbling flop houses to be used as permanent and permanent-supportive housing units. They also undertook the construction of two “pocket parks” and an elderly housing project. By 1987, only ten years after the publication of the containment strategy, the CRA had committed over \$58 million to these endeavors (Goetz 1992).

In addition to taking steps to expand the neighborhood’s existing housing stock and amenities, the Catholic Worker coalition established new social service organizations. The most notable among these was the founding of the Los Angeles Men’s Project (LAMP) in 1977, later

renamed Lamp Community to reflect the services it provided for both men and women. With start-up money provided by Frank Rice of Bullock's department stores, philanthropist Lowell Milken, and L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley, Lamp opened an emergency drop-in center, providing mental health counseling and drug addiction services. Lamp expanded considerably over the next four years, developing three housing complexes – the Lamp Village, Lamp Lodge, and St. George Hotel – that, to this day, continue to provide permanent-supportive and transitional housing. Through a number of experiments, Lamp's leadership focused the organization's efforts on projects that were increasingly "Skid Row-centric."

Mollie Lowery, the founder and original executive director of Lamp, recounted the serendipitous formation of their approach:

When we decided to get into permanent housing, we leased a whole eight-unit building in Santa Monica [a city located approximately 17 miles from Skid Row]. ... I found eight of the Lamp members to move in. Everyone was really excited about it. But when they got out there, it was like they had been completely removed from the community that Lamp had become. Because that's what it was all about. It was family, a community, a real home. And so they were living out in west L.A., but they were catching the bus to come in everyday to be around their friends and their community. Finally one day I sat with them and said "What's going on here? You guys can't just keep coming back down here. What's this about?" And they told me, "But this is our community. These are the people we

know and the people that took us in, and out there [in Santa Monica] we feel like foreigners.” So we shut it down and found a building in Skid Row.<sup>5</sup>

This experience led Lowery to rethink the organization’s underlying philosophy, which it has maintained for the last thirty years. According to this approach, Lamp’s social services should do more than simply address its Skid Row inhabitants’ immediate personal needs. Rather, services were intentionally re-designed to improve the neighborhood context in which its clients were living. As Lowery recalled:

As dysfunctional as Skid Row was, it was the only place people knew as adults. Once Lamp was created, it became a real safe haven for them, where they were really accepted. You know, everything was working, so I realized that what we needed to do was invest in making Skid Row a higher quality area to live, to not just have what people needed to survive, but to create a way to have people really thrive down here. ... We weren’t just service providers, we were advocates; advocates for system change.<sup>6</sup>

Thus resolved to cement Skid Row as a stable, viable, and permanent home, Lamp established institutions commonly found in other, more conventional neighborhoods, including a market, a retail store, and a laundromat. The organization also formed a company providing linen service to several of downtown’s largest commercial hotels. Staffing these enterprises primarily with

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mollie Lowery, February 13, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mollie Lowery, February 13, 2012.

individuals living in the area, Lamp provided job training, income, and autonomy, while generating much-needed economic activity throughout Skid Row. The terminology institutionalized by Lowery and her senior staff exemplify the organizations' approach, insisting that those involved in Lamp's services not be referred to as "clients," but rather as "residents" and "community members." The Catholic Worker shares this discursive strategy, intentionally referring to those they serve as "friends" rather than "clients."

### *Policing the Containment Zone*

In the years following the adoption of the 1976 Containment Plan, the Catholic Worker coalition emerged as the most successful of the various downtown interests in dictating how the city policed Skid Row. This began by explicitly writing a revised policing policy into the planning document, which mandated that "if anything beneficial is to be accomplished on Skid Row, the full cooperation of the Los Angeles Police Department is essential in an integrated program of 'protection and service' to the Skid Row person" (LACDC 1976b: 5-6). Once adopted by the city, this "police cooperation" translated into a new form of downtown policing. First, the LAPD patrols would be de-escalated within the containment zone. Calling for "a protective approach rather than a suppressive approach by law enforcement agencies" (LACDC 1967b: 4), the plan instructed the LAPD to provide a heightened level of leniency to the deviant behaviors encountered within the Skid Row neighborhood. Meanwhile, the LAPD was mandated to intensify patrols in the parks and public spaces located outside of Skid Row's new boundaries. Through such selective enforcement, the document's author's predicted that "Skid Row persons will be encouraged to stay within the contained area rather than wander through the Central

City” (LACDC 1967c: 9). The LAPD was thus not only charged with the day-to-day maintenance of Skid Row’s gravitational pull on the area’s down-and-out, but the department became central to the generation of the emerging spatial order for Skid Row’s revised neighborhood identity.

Skid Row advocates took proactive measures to further reinforce the relaxation of law enforcement as dictated by the containment approach. In 1976, the Center for Law in the Public Interest filed a class action lawsuit against the LAPD, the city, and the county on behalf of three Skid Row inhabitants for improper and discriminatory treatment. The lead plaintiff, Robert Sundance, a 49 year-old Ogala Sioux, was a frequent patron of the Hippie Kitchen and was considered a close friend by the members of the Catholic Worker organization. Over the fifteen years he had been living in Skid Row, Sundance was arrested over 200 times for public drunkenness, amassing over six years of time spent behind bars (Liddick 1976). According to the Catholic Worker’s Catherine Morris, “Whenever Robert was going to binge, he would stop by the kitchen and bring Jeff [Dietrich] this box with all of his things. He dropped it off because he knew that the cops were always going to come by and arrest him.”<sup>7</sup> Not only did the Catholic Worker coalition advance these arrests as inappropriately-punitive, the group accused the LAPD of inhumane treatment throughout the duration of transportation in “B-wagons” and incarceration in the “drunk tank.” As Morris indicates, “They would pile all the guys on top of each other into this god awful paddy wagon. Whenever they would turn a corner, these guys would literally roll around the back, hitting their heads and getting really hurt.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Jeff Dietrich, Catherine Morris, and Catholic Worker members, March 4, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Jeff Dietrich, Catherine Morris, and Catholic Worker members, March 4, 2011.

After an eight-week trial, the US District Court handed down a decision decriminalizing public inebriation. Importantly, the decision echoed the Catholic Worker's sentiments that Skid Row should be reconceived of, and policed, as a residential community. The court ruled that "public drinks on Skid Row should be treated the same as anyone else arrested for a misdemeanor" (Rosenzweig 2004), and ordered that those arrested for drunkenness be taken not to jail but to a detoxification center, where they would be provided beds and food. The court also directed that the B-wagons be padded, equipped with seatbelts, and carry no more than ten passengers at a time. Reflecting on the watershed decision, Morris emphasized, "You wouldn't believe how much it changed the way they treated the guys around here. They really stopped picking guys up. And if they picked them up they would just have to sit with them and wait until they sobered up. It was considered to be a lot more humane."<sup>9</sup>

While the containment approach was the most coherent principle of policing policy during this time, that principle was maintained primarily as the result of the continued and dogged efforts on behalf of the Catholic Worker coalition. Heightened tolerance within Skid Row's boundaries was preserved through a series of "policy spasms" (Goetz 1992: 545), in which the coalition defeated and reversed sporadic attempts by business, city, and LAPD leadership to intensify Skid Row patrols. This process is best illustrated in the back-and-forth that ensued over a series of LAPD "homeless sweeps" that occurred in the 1980s.

In 1985, property and business owners along the Central Avenue Corridor formed the Central City East Association (CCEA) – a Business Improvement District (BID) that encompassed the eastern, industrial section of the Skid Row neighborhood.<sup>10</sup> As a primary

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Jeff Dietrich, Catherine Morris, and Catholic Worker members, March 4, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Business Improvement Districts are formed by property and/or business owners in order to provide a heightened level of services, including security, street cleaning, and tourist assistance. A BID can only be established with the



impetus for its founding, the CCEA aggressively lobbied the LAPD to begin clearing the homeless and their encampments from the neighborhoods sidewalks (Clifford and McMillan 1987). Beginning in February of 1985, the LAPD responded to CCEA requests, walking through the neighborhood arresting homeless sleepers, followed by city maintenance trucks that swept up the remaining “debris.” The sweeps were met with immediate mobilization and resistance by the Catholic Worker coalition. According to Morris, “We would go out there with our cameras and block the bulldozers. As soon as we showed up, the police would call their supervisors. It would turn into a big stand-still. They wouldn’t work, we wouldn’t leave, and we started going to court.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, organizational ally, LAFLA, filed a series of lawsuits against the city to put a stop the police actions. As a result, after only two weeks, Mayor Bradley suspended the Skid Row sweeps. While Bradley resumed the policing a week later, he required that the LAPD post notices of any pending sweeps at least twelve hours prior to any action. Unsatisfied with these reforms, Skid Row advocates continued their protest actions and legal challenges. The mayor’s office reversed its course once again, designing new guidelines, mandating that the LAPD post a permanent homeless sweep schedule (Boyarsky 1987). In an effort at appeasement, the city also began a policy of providing SRO hotel vouchers to those individuals disrupted by police sweeps (Wolch and Dear 1993). Officers were directed not to make arrests unless they were able to provide a hotel voucher. Continuing their resistance, Skid Row advocates forced the city to not only suspend the sweeps once again, but to devise an alternative approach, whereby the city

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approval of at least 50% of owners within a geographically-defined area, who pay an annual fee in exchange for services (Meek and Hubler 2006). By 1999, the majority of L.A.’s downtown was overlain by BIDS. The CCEA BID alone encompasses 110 blocks, 575 property owners, and \$1.34 billion in annual sales (CCEA 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jeff Dietrich, Catherine Morris, and Catholic Worker members, March 4, 2011. Note that the actions of LACAN detailed in Chapter Five, specifically video recording police behavior, arose independently from the Catholic Worker’s efforts to document police sweeps. However, over time, the two organizations developed a close relationship in which they shared information as well as documentation.

leased a 12-acre lot on the eastern side of Skid Row, owned by Regional Transit District, in order to house a large portion of the neighborhood's homeless population. When fully operational, the "Tent City" accommodated roughly 500 individuals per night (Goetz 1992). Continuing their lawsuits, the coalition was able to keep the urban campground open into late 1987, for a number of weeks beyond its planned closing.

Upon their drafting the Containment Plan, the coalition emerged as the primary liaison between the community and the LAPD. Lamp was particularly instrumental in establishing a precedent whereby the LAPD consulted with the organization to develop a series of trainings and protocols. Mollie Lowery recalled how this yielded dramatic effects in tailoring officer behavior to better fit the dictates of the emerging spatial order:

There was an evolution of our relationship with the police. We developed a really solid footing in the Row. At this point we're obviously a real valued part of the community. ... We'd have fifty cops sitting at Lamp Village, getting trained by us on how to work with folks with mental illnesses. Those were some incredible experiences. We broke them down into smaller groups, and one of our mentally ill members sat in each group, and these cops ended up talking about their sister or their grandmother, or somebody that had a mental illness, and it made it very human for them. I mean, it was some of the greatest stuff.

All of a sudden, when we were out on the street dealing with something, these cops knew who we were. They'd come to us and bring folks in and say, "Mollie, can you take this guy in? He's on the streets." They started making referrals to us.

They started calling us when they were intervening with somebody and say, “Can you come and help us with this guy?” It really made a big difference.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, through formal city policy and planning decisions, as well as through more informal political actions, the Catholic Worker coalition exerted significant influence over Skid Row policing, instituting a more tolerant and permissive forms of policing. It is important to note that this “protective” (rather than “suppressive”) approach was developed and maintained during the precise time period in which the LAPD – under the direction of Chief Daryl Gates from 1978 to 1992 – developed a dramatically more aggressive character across the rest of the city. New LAPD programs such as the Public Disorder and Intelligence Division (PDID), Community Resources against Street Hoodlums (CRASH), Special Order 40, and Operation Hammer increased police surveillance in *other* economically distressed communities while lowering the threshold for police intervention into minor offenses.

Running counter to the LAPD policies of the time, the relaxation of policing in Skid Row proved satisfactory to both sides of the struggle over the future of Skid Row and its relationship to the rest of downtown. On the one hand, the Catholic Worker coalition viewed a more tolerant policing policy as a vital component in providing the living environment necessary to crystallize the neighborhood as a permanent residential community, ultimately altering Skid Row’s public identity. According to Gilda Haas, an urban planner with the Community Design Center at the time, “People talk about it now as the ‘Containment Plan,’ but when we were working on it, it was very clear that we were referring to it as the ‘Community Plan.’ It was about protecting this

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Mollie Lowery, February 13, 2012.

land as a community. The containment was what the other side was calling it.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, on the other hand, the move also served the needs of business interests and city leaders. These groups were drawn primarily to the benefits this strategy provided by pushing disreputable individuals and troublesome behaviors away from areas slated for redevelopment and reinvestment, and quarantining them within the newly-established boundaries of Skid Row.

### **Skid Row as a “Recovery Zone”: 1992-2011**

This arrangement was maintained until the 1990s, at which time the pendulum of law enforcement began to swing in the opposite direction, toward far more coercive and aggressive forms of law enforcement. As I will show in the following section, this shift was not necessarily caused by the onslaught of redevelopment or gentrification, as is advanced (quite uncritically and ahistorically) in the current scholarship on policing and urban political economy. As I highlighted above, these interests were already present and steering police policy in downtown Los Angeles, though in a very different direction. This shift was also not the automatic result of the introduction of new police leadership. Rather, this about-face in Skid Row policing can be more accurately explained by a transformation in the neighborhood’s organizational landscape and a realignment of the coalitions that had, throughout the twentieth century, controlled the neighborhood spatial order.

As mandated explicitly by the Containment Plan, the city began to concentrate an increasing number of social services within the boundaries of Skid Row. In doing so, the move had the unanticipated consequence of introducing into the area an entirely new set of actors,

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Gilda Haas, March 17, 2011.

characterized by organizational needs, ideological leanings, and policing demands than differed markedly from those typifying Skid Row organizations in the previous period. Whereas the Catholic Worker's coalition of progressive charitable organizations and public interest lawyers maintained an oppositional relationship with redevelopment-minded business interests and local government leaders, the newcomer institutions, comprised of a small number of large and resource-laden "mega-shelters" (DeVerteuil 2006), entered into a far more harmonious and mutually-dependent relationship with the police. As they gathered influence and supplanted the Catholic Worker coalition as the representative "voice" of Skid Row, the mega-shelters worked in an explicit manner to reconceptualize Skid Row's neighborhood identity. Through their newly-formed partnerships they began working to transform Skid Row from a *containment zone* to a *recovery zone*. As was the case in the previous time period, the LAPD was enlisted as a primary tool to enforce and further reproduce this definition of the neighborhood. This is the critical juncture at which the dominant conception of Skid Row shifts from a permanent, residential community set aside for severely impoverished and otherwise "deviant" populations to a transitional and instrumental space for the transformation of homeless, jobless, and addicted individuals.

### *The Introduction of "Mega-Shelters"*

By fiscal year 1990-1991, the CRA had budgeted \$8.56 million for shelters and other homeless service provision inside the boundaries of Skid Row (Wolch and Dear 1993). Over the next eleven years, from 1992 to 2003, three mega-shelters – referred to locally as the "big three" – were relocated to within Skid Row's boundaries. The first was the Los Angeles Mission in

1992. Previously located on the periphery of the containment zone, a new building was constructed for the organization on the corner Fifth and Wall Streets, at the core of what the Containment Plan labeled as the “Priority Intervention Area” (Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles 1985). The move altered the organization’s size and capacity, as well as its location, as the new four-story, 156,000 square-foot, 306 bed facility was more than triple its previous size. The L.A. Mission, nicknamed “Megamission” by the *Los Angeles Times*, would soon become the geographical and, as I will detail later, the *ideological* anchor for a “new” Skid Row. The L.A. Mission’s title as the largest mission in the nation lasted two years, until the distinction passed to the Union Rescue Mission (URM), which was relocated in 1994 from *outside* the boundaries of the containment area to within steps of the L.A. Mission on San Julian Street between Fifth and Sixth. Referred to as the “supermarket of missions” (Gordon 1994:1), the five-story, 235,000 square-foot, \$29 million facility holds over 1,000 beds and serves up to 3,000 meals per day. With an annual budget of over \$15 million, the facility also boasts a library, computer learning center, full gymnasium, chapel and 122 paid staff members. In 2003, the third facility, the Midnight Mission, was relocated to the corner of Sixth and San Julian, across the street from the URM and only a block from the L.A. Mission. Operating on a slightly smaller scale than the URM, the Midnight Mission’s new \$22 million, 123,000-square-foot facility houses 360 beds while providing seating for 500 people during meal services.

It is important to take note of the spatial and organizational reconfiguration effected by the influx of these three facilities. Already staggering when considered in isolation, the mega-shelters’ organizational capacity and range of services are even more significant when compared to that of a typical “pre-containment” organization. For instance, the Catholic Worker’s long-standing soup kitchen on Sixth and Gladys Streets – known locally as the “Hippie Kitchen” –

operates out of a single-story, street-front building containing little more than a kitchen. Food distribution and all facilities for clientele are provided outdoors, in a modest courtyard behind the main building. Serving meals only three days out of the week – from 7:00am to noon – the Catholic Worker has the capacity to accommodate eight to ten individuals in a communal house located two miles east of Skid Row. Since its inception, the Hippy Kitchen has operated solely on unpaid, volunteer labor.

The changes in locations and relative sizes of the neighborhood's missions from the time of the drafting of the Containment Plan in 1976 to the time of the completion of the Midnight Mission in 2003 are illustrated in figures 3 and 4. A comparison of the two time periods reveals the consolidation of neighborhood services within these few large facilities. Whereas missions operating in the previous period were distributed across the space, by 2003 they had been pulled away from the boundaries of the containment area into its center. The introduction of these facilities made Skid Row home to over 40% of all city shelter beds and 25% of all county shelter beds (DeVerteuil 2006).



Figure 10. Sizes and Locations of Shelters/Missions (1976).

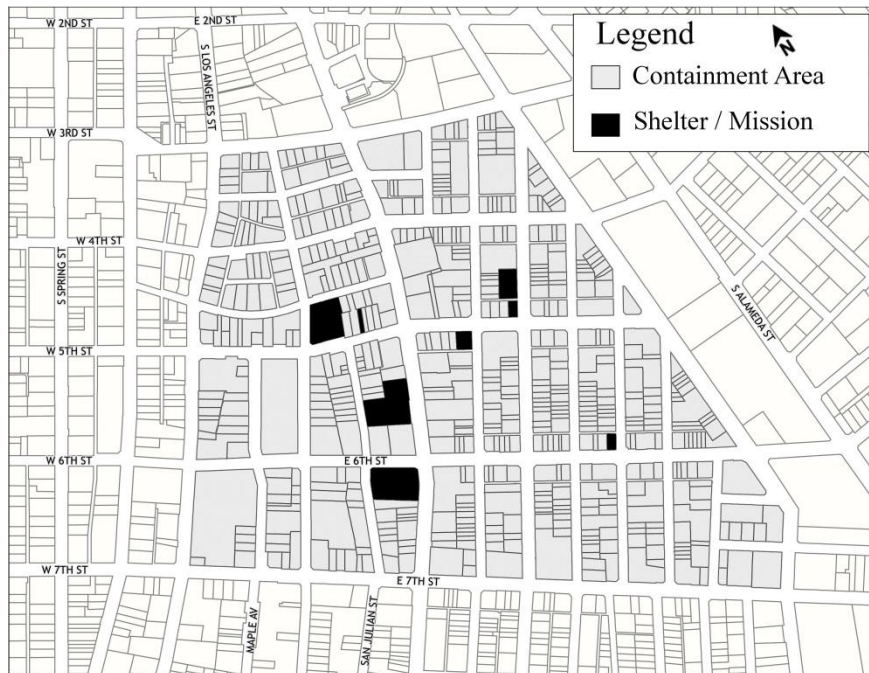


Figure 11. Sizes and Locations of Shelters/Missions (2010).



Far from coincidental, this centripetal consolidation was the direct result of the new relationship the mega-shelters forged with business interests and city officials, two sets of downtown actors that, in the previous period, were largely antagonistic to Skid Row organizations. As evidenced by the series of events leading to the 1976 plan, these groups had previously viewed the very same rescue missions as a serious impediment to downtown redevelopment. Perceived as perhaps the most alarming amongst these facilities, the Union Rescue Mission was problematically located at the corner of Second and Main Streets, placing it within one block of city hall, the newly-constructed Ronald Reagan State Office Building, the historic St. Vibiana's Cathedral, and directly in the path of a long-awaited Civic Center revitalization (McMillan 1992; Gordon 1994). According to individuals living and working in the area at the time, "lunchtime strolls" were filled with "scary detours around homeless panhandlers" (Gordon 1996:1). In response, the city approached the URM with the idea of relocating to within the boundaries of the containment area. In return for agreeing to move, the Community Redevelopment Agency provided the mission \$1.5 million for its former building and a \$6.5 million relocation grant. In its place, the CRA planned for the construction of "Plaza St. Vibiana," a pedestrian plaza and complex containing a performing arts center, library, hotel, and commercial and residential units (Community Redevelopment Agency [downtown strategic plan] YEAR; Los Angeles Housing Department 2004). The Midnight Mission similarly capitalized on appreciating downtown land values by selling its former property for \$12 million to a private development company, which covered the construction costs of the mission's significantly larger Skid Row facility. In this, Midnight Mission leadership explicitly their articulated to no longer impede the progress of downtown development (Coates 2005). The relocation provided for the redevelopment of the mission's previous space into a retail plaza and

high-end apartments. Viewing the mission's former site as the "gateway" to the business district, business owners reported excitement and relief at the move. In the words of Tracey Lovejoy, executive director of the CCEA, "by moving [the Midnight Mission] would take a lot of homeless people on the streets away" (Rivera 2003: B1).

Moving the facilities known to attract homeless and extremely low-income individuals into the containment area not only served to "revitalize" the sidewalks immediately adjacent to project areas, but it also kept urban ills at what some developers advanced publicly as a safe, yet profitable distance. In fact, real estate and retail developers in the Historic Core, located on Skid Row's western flank, advocated that they desired the area be gentrified, "but not completely;" rather, "retaining an inclusive mix of people will help make the area more cosmopolitan, more creative" (Skelley 2000: 106). These developers communicated that they had "an interest in keeping Skid Row *noir*, edgy, frontier-like in order to attract the young urban pioneers" (Harcourt 2005: 62). Indeed, it is clear from even a casual walk through today's downtown that incoming businesses have intentionally embraced Skid Row's proximity as part of their brand identity and marketing strategies (see figures 5 and 6).



Figure 12. The Down and Out (corner of Fifth and Spring Streets).



Figure 13. The Nickel Diner (524 Main Street).

One particular developer, Tom Gilmore, has been characterized in both media and academic accounts as one of, if not the single most important individual involved in downtown's "urban renaissance" (see for example Jones 1999; Harcourt 2005). As part of a joint federal and state-level program dubbed "Downtown Rebound," Gilmore's firm, Gilmore Associates, received \$6 million in subsidies for the conversion of four buildings at the intersection of Main and Fourth Streets, including buildings containing 250 live/work lofts, a restaurant, a bar, a theater, and gallery space (Los Angeles Housing Department 2004). In 2004, the city officially recognized and demarcated (through official signage) Gilmore's developments as "Old Bank District." Gilmore Associates also became the developer of the St. Vibiana Plaza at the former site of the URM. While an outspoken critic of the work of the Catholic Worker Coalition (see Harcourt 2005), Gilmore was, and currently remains, among the most vocal supporters of the mega-shelters. Since their relocations, Gilmore has consistently celebrated a new model of collaboration. For example, indicating his strong approval of the Midnight Mission's growth in 2003, Gilmore asserted:

The old model was that in order to do good business, you must eliminate the homeless from the area. ... I think from the business perspective we're beginning to understand that finding constructive ways to end homelessness is essential for long-term growth. There's an interesting new dynamic that's occurring. (Rivera 2003: B1)

*From "Three Hots and a Cot" to "Intensive Rehabilitation"*

While the mutual financial benefits brought about by the relocations help to explain the “new dynamic” that emerged between Skid Row’s newcomer organizations and redevelopment interests, there is an additional and important aspect of this realignment. The “big three” brought with them a revised set of organizational goals and service philosophies that resonated to a far larger degree with the long-standing interests of downtown business leaders and city officials; a resonance that would in time pave the way for a collaborative effort to intensify Skid Row policing. Beginning with the re-siting of the Los Angeles Mission, the “big three” began to advance that the traditional rescue mission model of “three hots and a cot” would no longer be considered an end in and of itself, but rather would serve as a “feeder” into their new organizational purpose, the administration of intensive, long-term recovery programs. In other words, the “big three” would no longer provide services that simply “managed” the conditions of homelessness, rather, they would rehabilitate area inhabitants in such a way that would propel them *out* of Skid Row as responsible, productive, and contributing citizens.

In the words of Reverend Mark Holsinger, the L.A. Mission’s executive director at the time, “Just feeding them and giving them a bed is not doing anything but letting them exist, like a vegetable” (McMillan 1992: 1). Instead, the aim of the new facility was:

[T]o erase the image of missions as places that just give men food, clothes and a quick gospel service. ... [W]hat we are about is helping ... men find hope, a much healthier self-esteem, reuniting the family whenever that is possible, finding gainful employment, and going back out there and making a contribution to the community. (Martinez 1995:3)

At the center of this effort, the LA Mission created a year-long “Fresh Start Program” designed with the explicit goal of training homeless individuals to “re-establish themselves in mainstream society” through “a rigorous schedule of job training, work duties, educational classes, spiritual counseling, and biblical instruction” (Martinez 1995: 3).

Warren Currie, then-president of the Union Rescue Mission, articulated a strikingly similar sentiment in an extensive interview conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*. According to Currie:

We started thinking of the significance of the biblical story of ‘teaching a man to fish’ or, rather, how we could have a permanent impact and have long-term success on the homeless problem. So we developed a ‘sustained recovery program.’ (Mungen 1997: 3)

As with the other mega-shelters, the sustained recovery programs at the URM unfolded in a number of stages. First, the mission asks aspiring program participants to begin working for several weeks, serving food or completing maintenance chores. Currie reported that this work period is vitally important, as it allows caseworkers to accurately observe “if the person is for real,” determining if that individual has the commitment necessary to proceed in the program. Once deemed ready, caseworkers perform a comprehensive assessment in order to begin developing “structure and accountability and reinstating work values.” Upon officially enrolling, individuals progress along incremental and distinct steps toward full societal reintegration:

There are different stages in our 12-month program. . . . Everybody here wears a badge and they are color-coded. Red is for the first 30 days, because they are detoxing and it's our greatest turnover point. So we treat them kind of delicately. A yellow badge means you're starting in the learning center and, finally, you receive the green badge, which means you're on your way out. It can take from six months to nine months before we deem you ready for graduation, and when we return them to society. They have their health back and a job skill. . . . We consider ourselves to be re-parenting. (Mungen 1997: 3)

Reflecting on the first years of the program, Currie further asserted that, "What we found, on average, was if a person stays in a very disciplined program for one year, regardless of their sex, they have a substantially higher success rate, because they developed new habits of life and the old negative pulls don't seem to have the same influence" (Mungen 1997: 3).

Importantly, this shift in organizational philosophy brought the larger neighborhood conditions more prominently onto the rescue missions' collective radar. While the members of the Catholic Worker coalition had devoted significant attention to the social life existing beyond their facilities' walls during the prior containment period, these efforts took on a very different focus for the mega-shelters. Instead of committing resources to generating conditions capable of enabling permanent and comfortable residence in the area, leadership of the "big three" focused on eliminating those neighborhood characteristics they perceived as undermining inhabitants' rehabilitation and eventual *exit* from Skid Row. For the mega-shelters, individual (and as a result, organizational) success became dependent upon the organizations' ability to separate their

clients from previous behavioral “triggers,” while continually insulating them from the “temptations” existing along the nearby streets and sidewalks that threatened to detract from commitment to the program, or worse, prompt a relapse.

In 1992, in an attempt to more systematically grasp these “outside obstacles” to their rehabilitation programs, the Los Angeles Mission partnered with Gallup to design the country’s first ever “homeless poll” (Hubler 1992). Surveying 665 men and women within the containment area, the Los Angeles Mission utilized the survey to publicly proclaim that the “true” desire among the area’s homeless was to acquire job training and drug rehabilitation programs, *not* donations and hand-outs, as many in the public had previously thought. According to the L.A. Mission’s Holsinger, “A lot of people have the wrong idea about the homeless. They want to come downtown and give them a sandwich. But that’s not what they need. I’ve been doing this for 27 years and even I was surprised” (Hubler 1992: 1). This “realization” marked a pronounced shift in the mega-shelters’ public stance on these kinds of behaviors perceived as “enabling” the area’s inhabitants to remain on the street, outside the reach of recovery programs.

It is critical to note that attracting and retaining program participants had direct consequences on the mega-shelter’s organizational survival. According to a funding arrangement referred to as “pay per bed,” mega-shelters are unable to collect on public contracts until *after* they have rendered services to program participants. As a result, these large facilities face a serious financial dilemma. Million-dollar operating costs can only be shouldered by attracting a sufficient number of clients to receive reimbursement. Organizational longevity and growth thus demand that an increasing number of the down and out flow through facility doors. As Rooney (1980) argues, these large rescue missions can be considered as the archetypical form of a “successfully failing organization.” If their programs are too effective in lifting individuals out of



poverty, they risk losing clientele that is vital to their existence. Conversely, if programs are too unsuccessful, they risk losing funding. To walk this precarious line, a successfully failing organization must appear to be making substantial progress while at all times highlighting the severity of problems that require renewed effort. Overstating the dangers of allowing (potential) clients' behaviors to go unmitigated is a primary strategy utilized to tap into moral debates and evoke fear that can attract further resource investment and public support.<sup>14</sup>

The first of such behaviors to become problematized by the mega-shelters was panhandling. In January of 1993, when the Central City Association launched its "Downtown Safe and Clean" Program, the mega-shelters were among the program's most vocal participants. Safe and Clean called on businesses near Skid Row to hire private security guards and to take a more vigilant stance against loitering and begging. Importantly, the program included a "transient assistance" component, whereby security guards would steer homeless individuals into a set of cooperating rescue missions (Yokoi 1993). In an op-ed column that appeared later that year, the L.A. Mission's Holsinger emphatically wrote of the program:

Now more than ever it's important the public know the best way to help the homeless. It's not by giving money to the panhandler or tolerating encampments. *Those responses merely enable the homeless to remain homeless. Instead, the most effective way to help a homeless person get off the streets and back into society is through intensive rehabilitation. ... The public can help most by*

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in 1993, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that in designing billboard advertisements to be placed throughout the city, the Los Angeles Mission was intentionally misrepresenting the racial and gender demographics of their homelessness clients in order to better appeal to potential donors (Harris 1993).

supporting missions and other agencies that specialize in helping the homeless rebuild their lives. (Holsinger 1993: 6, emphasis mine)

Holsinger's words closely paralleled those of Daniel McIntyre, CEO and president of the CCA, who similarly wrote, "The [CCA] would like to educate the public that ... *if you want to truly help an individual, please contribute your time or your money to an organization that can be held accountable*" (McIntyre 1993: 23, emphasis mine). McIntyre concluded his statement by explicitly listing the names of such organizations, which included the Los Angeles Mission and the Union Rescue Mission.

Following this momentum, Jan Perry, the Los Angeles Councilwoman representing Skid Row and the city's ninth district, introduced a motion to create a city ordinance banning all charitable food giveaways on any street or sidewalk located within the containment area.<sup>15</sup> At the time of its introduction, the motion proposed to make these outdoor food giveaways a misdemeanor offense, punishable by a fine or jail-time (Catania 2003). Criticizing food giveaways as unstructured, unsafe, and unhealthy, Perry offered simple and concise instruction for those wishing to assist Skid Row's inhabitants: "Contact the missions, some of the larger organizations, and volunteer your time" (Catania 2003: 20). Perry's position on enabling those who "chose" to live on the street was emphatic. She stated that "If we leave people on the street and don't create ways to bring them in for treatment, the problem will continue. Homeless people don't need their right to die protected. They need help" (Perry 2005: M5). Rather unsurprisingly, the proposed ordinance was greeted with overwhelming support from local business associations. As downtown business leader similarly commented, "The reality is, there

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<sup>15</sup> Los Angeles City Council File 02-2214

isn't any need for food down here. If you're living down here, you can get five meals a day from the various missions. ... That's the one thing we're not lacking down here" (Stewart 2003: 1). Given the fact that over 60% of Skid Row's inhabitants – including both homeless and housed individuals – reported “sidewalk giveaways” as a regular source of food (Los Angeles Community Action Network 2005), concerted efforts to terminate these activities make survival in the area even more contingent on entering the mega-shelters. In a response that would have been considered unprecedented before the 1990s, representatives from the L.A. Mission, Union Rescue Mission, and Midnight Mission joined business interests as outspoken advocates of the ban on giveaways outside of their facilities. This type of response would become the norm in the coming years, translating directly into a revised policing policy.

### *Policing the Recovery Zone*

The organizational and discursive reconfigurations brought about by the relocation and rapid growth of newcomer organizations led to a dramatic transformation in Skid Row policing. Rather than maintain the historical oppositions with the LAPD, the mega-shelters, acting as the new voice of the down-and-out, formed a new relationship with the local criminal justice system. This was first evident in 1999, when officers, armed with brochures for the mega-shelters, began concerted efforts to direct the individuals they encountered throughout their patrols into rehabilitation programs (Hayasaki 2000). Central Division leadership instructed these officers to begin giving citations for blocking the sidewalk, jaywalking, and other public nuisance offenses to those who “resisted” officers directions. As reported by the *Times*, the move “[broke] a decades-old, albeit uneasy, truce, declaring war on the city's homeless” (Decker 2000: B1); a

truce that was vigilantly maintained by the Catholic Worker coalition. Yet, the rationale given by Central Division representatives was presented in a far less punitive tone. Rather, as local police leadership argued, by escalating enforcement Central Division was making the neighborhood safer for those individuals seeking treatment and rehabilitation by removing the opportunities for negative and harmful influences.

This finding illustrates that order-maintenance policing tactics were adopted in Skid Row *at least three years prior* to the hiring of its most notorious practitioner, William Bratton, who famously developed, applied, and systematized the “broken windows” model of policing in New York during the 1990s. By October 4, 2002, three weeks *before* Bratton took over the LAPD, Central Division leadership had already drafted an aggressive, comprehensive strategy for Skid Row policing, titled the *Homeless Reduction Strategies* (Blasi 2007). The language in the *Homeless Reduction Strategies* – advocating an increase in the number of officers deployed in Skid Row along with regular patrols devoted to targeted minor offenses – would eventually serve (nearly verbatim) as the basis for the Safer Cities Initiative in 2006. While Bratton was not responsible for originating Skid Row’s current model of policing, he certainly proved to be a receptive audience to the changes in policing policies that were already in motion.

What Bratton *did* add to the existing plan was an increased emphasis on pairing its aggressive order-maintenance activities with a “community policing” component. While “community policing” has been increasingly recognized as a remarkably amorphous term (Herbert 2001), it is generally understood as “a set of policies and programs aimed at increasing interaction between the police and the community for the purposes of fostering joint ownership and responsibility for a defined set of community problems arising from local crime and disorder” (Huey 2007: 30-31). The shifts delineated thus far in regard to the neighborhood’s

organizational landscape are particularly consequential in this respect. In an effort to better avoid the legal challenges and public opposition that were expected to arise upon the launch of SCI, Bratton resolved to build on the experiences he gained in New York to gather better support from the Skid Row's most prominent stakeholders.

As the central component of this effort, Bratton successfully lobbied city leaders to hire George Kelling – one of the original architects of the broken windows theory – as a consultant. At a price of \$556,000, Kelling's most significant contribution was his convening of monthly meetings throughout 2002 and 2003 that for the first time brought together city officials, downtown business interests, and representatives from the mega-shelters. Attendees included several of those individuals already involved in collaboration, including Ralph Plumb (chief executive of the Union Rescue Mission), Larry Adamson (president and CEO of the Midnight Mission), and Tracey Lovejoy (executive director of the Central City East Association). These meetings drew on existing organizational ties to develop a more proactive and comprehensive policing strategy. Importantly, as described in the extensive minutes kept throughout these meetings, “the Union [Rescue] Mission indicated that there was a *new* coalition of service providers now willing to work with other agencies, in collaboration, to deal with [Skid Row's] problems.”<sup>16</sup> These meetings mark the moment at which the “big three” supplanted the Catholic Worker Coalition as the primary liaison between the Skid Row community and the LAPD.

In an effort to protect LAPD from later criticisms, Kelling enlisted the group to help the LAPD “get to the moral high ground”<sup>17</sup> by developing a “coordinated strategy for communication to the press regarding the forthcoming effort in Skid Row.”<sup>18</sup> Together, the

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<sup>16</sup> Minutes, “LA Safer City Project – Central City East,” August 6, 2003. Emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes, “LA Safer City Initiative – Central City East,” September 19, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, “LA Safer City Initiative – Central City East,” November 7, 2003.

group prepared media statements and op-ed pieces that were designed to tap into various public sympathies (Blasi 2007). The following *L.A. Times* op-ed exemplifies the messages emerging from these discussions. Titled “A New Perspective Emerges Along Skid Row,” the column illustrates how long-term rehabilitation programs and law enforcement had become intertwined as the only “true” form of assistance and compassion. Marshall McNott, president of the L.A. Mission, wrote:

We do not need more lawsuits from those well-meaning but unproductive attempts at fixing problems of homelessness any more than we need lawsuits against the city to stop legitimate and needed law enforcement. No one deserves to live in degraded squalor and filth – and menace their neighbors. The community has the responsibility to provide safe streets, even for the people who choose no other place to go, even with available options. We have the responsibility to help the less fortunate find those options. A permissive approach, while perhaps appealing to the humaneness in all of us, does little to provide meaningful assistance to those so needing it; assistance such as food, beds, showers, and long-term programs ... are so much more restorative than mere words and lawsuits. We support the work of the Los Angeles Police Department as it continues to enforce the laws of our community built on a foundation of “compassion and sensitivity to the special needs and conditions that the truly homeless face. (McNott 2003: B24)

Other measures designed to preempt opposition included the conscious decision to delay the escalation of enforcement until after the holiday season, when the rescue missions traditionally attracted hundreds of volunteers and increased media coverage.<sup>19</sup>

The concrete law enforcement strategy that emerged from these meetings explicitly linked policing to mega-shelter programs. In addition to calling for the redeployment of at least fifty additional patrol officers to enforce minor “quality-of-life” offenses, the freshly-inked outline for the Safer Cities Initiative called for the deployment of two senior lead officers (SLOs) that would act as “Homeless Coordinators” to “develop and distribute Outreach Flyers” that would “delineate shelter and service locations, providing alternatives to living on the street.”<sup>20</sup> The outline further stressed that service providers would be “actively involved in the development of the L.A. Safer City Initiative and their services will be expanded prior to any enforcement action.”<sup>21</sup>

From 2003 to SCI’s launch in 2006, the LAPD found ways to make good on this pledge, formalizing a number of collaborative programs and legislative efforts that legitimized more aggressive enforcement while expanding the rescue missions’ organizational capacities. The first major collaboration was the Streets or Services (SOS) Program. Under the SOS Program, those arrested within the boundaries of Skid Row on misdemeanor charges are screened by caseworkers during booking. At that time, arrestees are provided with two options – individuals may either proceed directly to jail, or they can avoid incarceration by enrolling in one of the participating mega-shelters’ recovery programs. If arrestees elect the latter option, case workers

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<sup>19</sup> Minutes, “LA Safer City Initiative – Central City East,” September 19, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Intradepartmental Correspondence, “Central Area 2004 Strategic Plan to Address Encampments,” January 13, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Internal Memorandum, “L.A. Safer City Initiative: Training and Deployment Plan, Central Area,” October 13, 2003.

and other mega-shelter staff members are assigned to escort these individuals directly from booking to the designated facility (see figure 7). Police statistics demonstrate that a significant number of inhabitants encountered this ultimatum. The SOS Program thus brought a wave of new and perhaps previously-unwilling clientele into the rescue mission facilities. While engaged in the counseling, job training, and community service required by their programs, arrestees also contribute to the manual labor – general maintenance, cleaning, and food preparation – necessary to keep mega-shelter operating costs at a minimum.

Despite the collaborative effort, the mega-shelters found that they were largely unable to keep their new clients enrolled in programs long enough to accomplish a significant retraining and recovery. For example, during a ten month sample period spanning from August 2006 to June 2007, of the 2,218 individuals arrested on misdemeanor charges and 377 referred to SOS, only 34 completed the 21-day program. The median length of stay within the program was only three days, with nearly a third absconding on the first day (Blasi 2007). For the mega-shelters, the underlying reason for these sudden departures was straightforward. According to Margaret Willis of People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), the umbrella organization representing the mega-shelter partners, “It’s very difficult to keep people, especially when they’re in or near Skid Row, because there are so many temptations. ... We’re trying to make it a less desirable option, but it’s an area that keeps calling people back” (Rivera 2003: B1).<sup>22</sup>

This rationale prompted the mega-shelters and their coalition partners in the business community and city government to embark on a second collective project, taking more proactive steps to address the “temptations” provided by the drugs and alcohol available on surrounding sidewalks. In February of 2006, 25 leaders from these three downtown spheres organized a “fact-

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<sup>22</sup> In Chapter Three, I take up the perspective of some of the individuals who have absconded from the recovery programs mandated by the SOS Program.



finding mission” to the east coast to better learn how New York dealt with homelessness-related issues during the 1990s (Coates 2006; DiMassa 2006). The trip was attended by many of those individuals discussed thus far at the center of the shifts in Skid Row’s organizational landscape, including Midnight Mission director Orlando Ward; Central Division captain Andy Smith; L.A. Councilwoman Jan Perry; developer Tom Gilmore; and CCA President and CEO Carol Schatz. In addition to touring New York’s social service organizations, courts, and public parks, the group attended instructional sessions on the broken windows theory presented by George Kelling. These sessions stressed the need for even more collaboration between the groups (Coates 2006: 8).

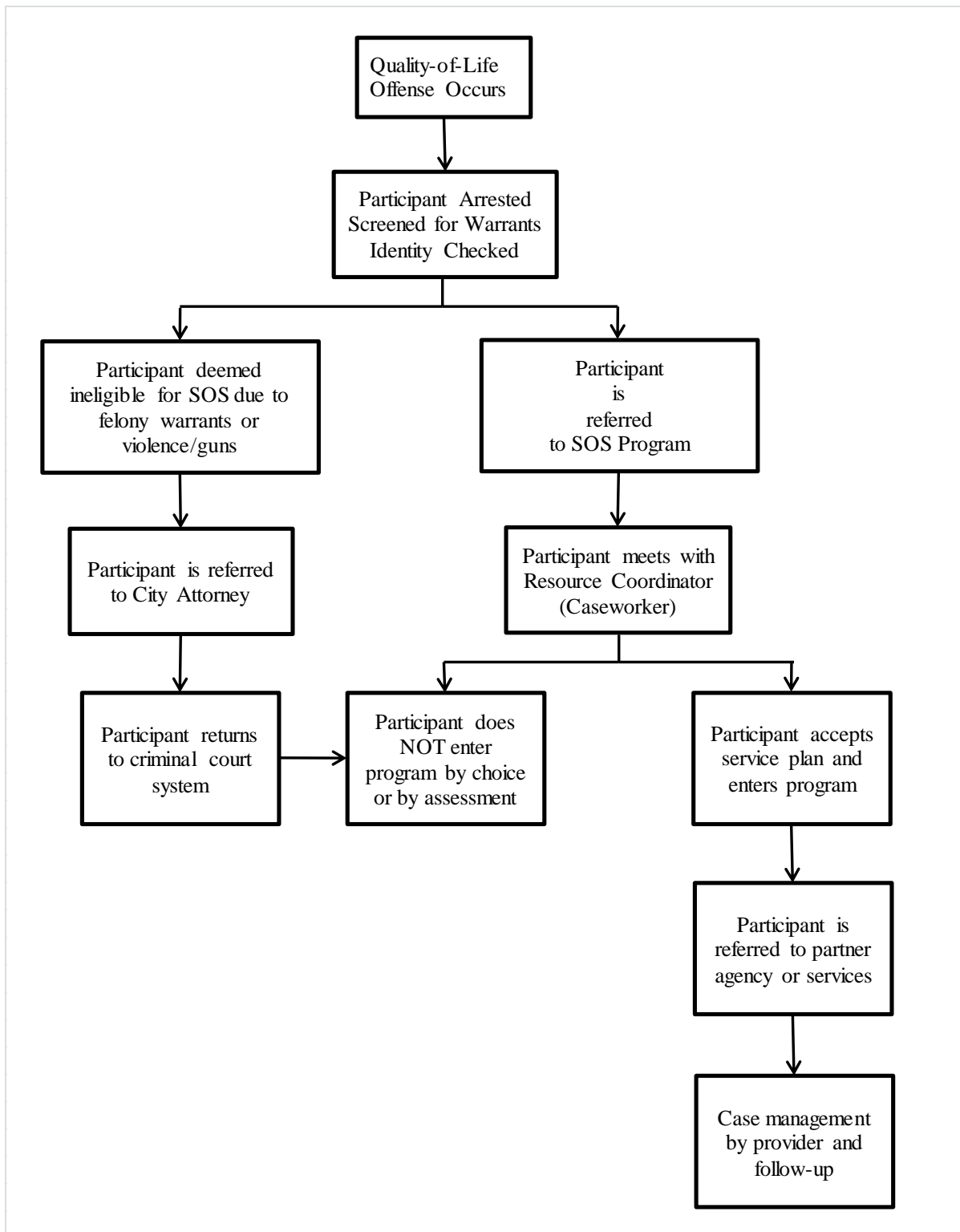


Figure 7. Streets or Services (SOS) Process Chart (2007).

Upon their return to Los Angeles, the group heeded Kelling's instructions, and worked together to design state-level legislation that would enhance their long-standing efforts to eliminate the influences perceived as "ambushing" individuals on the path to recovery (DiMassa and Winton 2005; Rivera 2006). On February 16, 2006, Gill Cedillo, California State Senator and organizer of the New York trip, introduced Senate Bill 1318. The bill added sentencing enhancements for any individual caught selling drugs within 1,000 feet of a drug treatment center, detoxification facility, or homeless shelter. The bill was signed into law on September 29, 2006, one day after the official launch of the Safer Cities Initiative. While not included in the final draft, the bill originally included an additional measure that recast Skid Row as a "narcotics recovery zone," in which anyone on probation for drug offenses would be forbidden from the area bounded by Main, Third, Alameda, and Seventh Streets. The bill made exceptions to this ban for those enrolled in rehabilitation programs (Coates 2006b). As further evidence of the close ties between the various Skid Row interests, SB 1318 was sponsored by an additional member of the New York trip, Fabian Núñez, Speaker of the State Assembly. Interestingly, in a series of interviews conducted in 2004, Bernard Harcourt (2005: 20-35) reported that during this time, Núñez was a resident in one of Tom Gilmore's "Bank District" buildings. Further, not only did Núñez tout Gilmore as a close friend, but Harcourt (2005) also reported that Núñez was "enamored" with Gilmore, particularly impressed with his "positive impact" on Skid Row.

In a third dimension of mission-business-government collaboration, the mega-shelter coalition began monthly "Skid Row Safety Walks" in 2005, coordinated by the Midnight Mission and the CCEA. The walk regularly drew over 200 "stakeholder" participants, regularly including members of the New York delegation, as well as Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and the L.A. City Attorney's Office. The monthly event was designed to be one-part public relations –

described as “a vehicle by which to educate government leaders, the public and the press about the dangers of life (and death) on Skid Row” (CCEA 2005: 6) – and one-part social service outreach. During the hour-long procession through the neighborhood, participants are flanked by mega-shelter staff, LAPD officers, and CCEA security guards – known locally as the “red shirts.” The group approaches those they perceive as homeless and extend an offer to transport them to one of the participating facilities in one of the vans trailing closely behind. While I did not observe a single individual accept the offer of transportation and shelter during six months of observation in 2010, the CCEA has long-reported that as a result of the outreach efforts, “dozens of homeless individuals were convinced to go into shelter, provided with medical and mental health treatment and reunited with their families” (CCEA 2005: 7).

### *The Safer Cities Initiative and the Recovery Zone Injunction*

One September 28, 2006, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative.<sup>23</sup> Beyond indicating that an additional 50 patrol officers would be permanently deployed into the area, the mayor’s press release promised that the ensuing aggressive enforcement would be “leading homeless individuals to housing and services.” The task would be accomplished in large part by expanding the SOS Program. In doing so, the Safer Cities Initiative framed Skid Row officers as front-line outreach workers for the area’s service providers. This reframing was even more evident in the two additional collaborative programs developed in the wake of the 2006 launch that utilize increasing contact with LAPD officers and the threat of incarceration to funnel Skid Row inhabitants into the mega-shelters. The first

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<sup>23</sup> Office of the Mayor, “City Launches Initiative to Reduce Crime on Skid Row: 50 More Police Officers Deployed to Area.” Press Release, September 24, 2006.

program, Homeless Alternatives to Living on the Street (HALO), offers the thousands of individuals receiving pedestrian citations per month the option to work off the monetary penalties by completing community service in one of the “big three.” The second program, the Los Angeles Homeless Court Program (HCP), provides an alternative and more lenient adjudication system for homeless arrestees. Held monthly at one of the mega-shelter facilities, HCP may *only* be accessed by individuals who have participated in a rehabilitation program for at least 90 continuous days, and have not been rearrested or ticketed in the previous six months. Further, individuals wishing to access HCP may only do so by obtaining a letter of support from a case manager at an approved facility detailing the applicant’s positive rehabilitation progress.

The police measures instituted in conjunction with the Safer Cities Initiative should be seen as providing a powerful “stick” to the mega-shelter’s “carrot” in a joint effort to rehabilitate and transform those living in Skid Row. This relationship is further revealed by analyzing exactly *where* LAPD officers issue the citations designed to propel individuals into long-term recovery programs. While the LAPD reports that it does not maintain a comprehensive record of the citations issued by officers, two organizations – LAFLA and the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN) – began compiling a log of the citations that they encountered during their free weekly legal clinic. During a nine month period – between January 1, 2009 and November 4, 2009 – the LAFLA/LACAN clinic provided legal advice on 622 citations. As one might expect, of the 395 citation with adequate locational data, 20% were issued within the “buffer zone” outlined in the 1976 Containment Plan, designed to prevent Skid Row inhabitants from venturing into the rest of downtown. Quite surprisingly, however, nearly half (48%) of these tickets were issued *inside* the boundaries of the containment zone, concentrated within a single two block area, along the sidewalks adjacent to the L.A. Mission, Union Rescue Mission,

and Midnight Mission. This data suggests that while officers have maintained much of their previous role of enforcing containment, this role has been matched, and perhaps even overshadowed by an effort to provide a final nudge into the mega-shelter doors. Given the fact that the typical fine for pedestrian citations is \$159, and that many in Skid Row live solely on a General Relief payment of \$221 a month, these citations often go unpaid. In months, the fine increases to over \$500 and the violator's license may be suspended. A warrant may also be issued for their arrest, making any subsequent police contact, including a future citation, grounds for arrest and, more importantly, grounds for "diversion" into a rehabilitative program.

In the years following the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative, the "big three" cemented themselves as primary *authors* of the LAPD policies in Skid Row. In April of 2010, under the direction of the mega-shelter coalition, City Attorney Carmen Trutanich filed an injunction that, echoing the provisions that were ultimately dropped from the language of SB 1318, which sought to re-designate Skid Row as the "Central City Recovery Zone." Modeled after several gang injunctions in effect across South Central Los Angeles, the Skid Row injunction bans troublesome individuals – specifically those suspected of drug activity – from the entire 50 blocks of Skid Row. In a radio interview, LAPD Commander (and former Central Division Captain), Blake Chow, stated that the injunction was designed to provide "an additional tool in the police toolkit," whereby witnessing criminal activity would no longer be a requirement to make certain detainments or arrests.<sup>24</sup> The stay-away order lists 300 specific individuals as well as 800 *unnamed* "surrogates and associates," giving officers the ability to bypass probable cause, stopping *suspected* troublemakers for their mere presence on the streets of the Recovery Zone. The lowered threshold for such detainments is evident in the document's lengthy descriptions of

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<sup>24</sup> "Do Gang Injunctions Work?" Airtalk, 89.3 KPCC. April 8, 2010.

the various suspicious behaviors and practices cited as typical in Skid Row. One passage goes so far as to depict the mere appearance of a physical disability as sufficient grounds for police intervention:

Some street drug dealers...use the community around them to mask their behavior such as using a wheelchair or walker to conceal their supply of narcotics, while also looking disabled. This also serves as a deterrent to law enforcement as a disabled suspect requires additional legal safeguards and resources in the event of an arrest.<sup>25</sup>

This passage reflects several pages of alarming descriptions of criminals “on public streets, sidewalks, in and around alcoves and entry ways of businesses and restaurants;” “that trespass on private property such as bathrooms of the various shelters and hotels to conduct their illicit operations,” while “walking multiple ‘laps’ around certain blocks as they sell narcotics in the process...in a ‘drive by’ mode of operation, blocking traffic and interfering with the quiet enjoyment of the Central City Recovery Zone.”<sup>26</sup>

While hailed by LAPD leadership as the biggest advance in Skid Row policing since the Safer Cities Initiative, the injunction was principally developed by Andy Bales of the Union Rescue Mission. Confirmed by LAPD representatives in the same April 2010 radio interview, Bales had been marketing this idea to key criminal justice officials in the year leading up to the injunction. The language of the injunction presents the efficiency and overall success the mega-shelters as the underlying purpose of the criminal justice strategy. This can be seen clearly in the

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<sup>25</sup> Complaint to Enjoin, Abate, and Prevent Public Nuisance Activity, pages 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> Complaint to Enjoin, Abate, and Prevent Public Nuisance Activity, pages 8-9.

articulation of acceptable reasons to enter the newly-established Recovery Zone, which includes the utilization of “recovery services,” explicitly listing the “big three” by name. Further, according to the injunction’s “Hardship Exemption,” individuals may receive a one year reprieve to the stay-away order by enrolling in one of the approved long-term recovery programs. Once enrolled, individuals are mandated to obtain written proof of their exemption from the court, which must be carried at all times while in the area, and must be presented to officers upon request.

### *A New Spatial Order*

Over the 18 year period – from the relocation of the LA Mission in 1992 to the filing of the Recovery Zone Injunction in 2010 – the “big three” moved from the (geographic and symbolic) periphery of the containment zone to the core of a newly emergent neighborhood identity that reconsidered Skid Row as a recovery zone. In this movement, the mega-shelters supplanted the more progressive Catholic Worker coalition as the prevailing representative voice of Skid Row’s population and corresponding policing needs. This shift was highly consequential for the ability of Skid Row’s traditional organizations to resist the escalation of law enforcement. Reflecting on the Catholic Worker’s diminished ability to exert control over policing in the neighborhood, Jeff Dietrich of the Catholic Worker recalled the late 1990s and early 2000s:

It felt like we suddenly started losing. Before, there really wasn’t anyone actively opposing what we were doing in an outward, high-stakes way. There wasn’t really pressure to go the other way, opposite of us. So we used to get support from a lot



of people, even the unions. People were constantly coming out to support us who you wouldn't even expect to support us, or people who won't support us anymore. People who are now opposing us. ... It used to be that if we called up the *Times* and told them that we were having a demonstration in Skid Row, they would send somebody down. We would get a hit. And they would read it all in council chambers. They would see it and that was huge. We used to get an op-ed piece in the paper multiple times per year. In fact, they would call *us* to see what *we* had planned! They would cover just about everything that we were doing. But now things are different. It's like suddenly we became regarded as the lunatic fringe. You know, essentially pariahs. Now we try to phone in a press release and they go, 'Who is this?'<sup>27</sup>

Importantly, this shift in Skid Row's organizational landscape did more than simply reduce the ability of the Catholic Worker and its coalition partners to attract public support and mitigate the aggressive policing of the neighborhood's inhabitants, as had once been the case. The philosophy of recovery propelled by the newcomer mega-shelters now recast the previous collection of organizations – and their long-standing attempts to forge Skid Row as a stable residential neighborhood extremely low-income individuals – as “out of place” within the new spatial order. As a result, any attempts to temper aggressive policing were increasingly reframed by the mega-shelters and their partners in the business and government sectors as tantamount to the illegal activity of the drug dealers and criminals who they advanced as preying upon the vulnerable individuals occupying the sidewalks.

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Jeff Dietrich, Catherine Morris, and Catholic Worker members, March 4, 2011.

Now considered dangerous to the community, the older organizations were argued to be preventing individuals from ending their dependency on public welfare and drugs that inhibit potential clients from eventually migrating out of Skid Row as self-sufficient, productive citizens. The manner in which the mega-shelter coalition sought to marginalize rival organizations is well illustrated in this group's assault on Lamp in the years immediately following the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative. Since its inception, Lamp has been considered a national leader in the "housing first" model. Diverging from the model of stepwise, long-term rehabilitation utilized by Skid Row's mega-shelters whereby clients graduate through a series of successive phases of commitment and responsibility, Lamp has no behavioral or sobriety commitments as conditions for housing. Rather than exist as a "reward" for enrolling in mental health and drug addiction services, the housing first model provides clients with supportive housing as a "prerequisite" for coping with the challenges of homelessness, addiction, mental illness, and HIV/AIDS. According to this logic, once individuals are provided a comfortable, safe, and secure place to live, they will become far more receptive to social services. For organization staff, the model is particularly effective because it allows them to build trust with clients. As Lamp director Casey Horan emphasized, "People with a mental illness are suspicious of medication. But these people, if they are housed, within three weeks they will be seeing a psychiatrist and taking meds" (Rubin 2007).

Largely as a result of this philosophy, Lamp quickly emerged as one of the most vocal opponents of the Safer Cities Initiative. For senior staff, aggressive order-maintenance policing was perceived as largely antithetical to the organization's approach to recovery, housing, and mental health. Throughout my fieldwork, staff members asserted that constant police contact with their clients in the form of stop-and-frisks, jaywalking citations, and probation questioning

had the ultimate effect of exacerbating mental illnesses problems. For example, Anat Rubin, Lamp's director of public policy at the time, relayed the following examples:

We have a lot of paranoid schizophrenics. There was a client who thought that everyone had access to his personal records. He has this thing where he doesn't like to have his name written anywhere. One day he was riding his bike out of our office on Crocker, back to his place. He had been doing really well so he wasn't living in our communal facility. He was only coming into Lamp for his therapy. He was always bringing candy for the staff. So he was riding his bike away from our office and he got stopped by cops halfway down the block. He was given a ticket for riding his bike on the wrong side of the sidewalk. It really hit him hard. He turned his bike around and came into the office. He was just beside himself as he was telling me what happened. He just kept saying, 'My name, my name, they have my name. My name is on the citation.' He just couldn't seem to shake it. I wanted him to go to the legal clinic to talk to a lawyer about fighting the ticket, but this is not the kind of guy who will do that. He doesn't want to ever have his name down on record. And this happens all the time. We had another member who was picked up with Klonopin [anti-seizure medication]. He was taken in for possession with intent to sell, and he spent several days in county jail. That may not seem like a long time, but for our clients, that's like regressing a year in their therapy. Especially for people who deal with paranoia.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Anat Rubin, August 27, 2009.

In recounting these and a number of other similar examples, Rubin emphasized that not only did frequent police contact have an adverse effect on mental health, but that clients' mental health issues frequently also made them less able to maintain legal obligations, much less contest unlawful detainments, citations, and arrests; a predicament that resulted in even further exacerbated the impact of even the most routine police contact.

As a result, Lamp refused to allow LAPD officers unfettered access to its housing units. This was in stark contrast to the policies of the mega-shelters, in particular the URM and the Midnight Mission, who called on Central Division officers to incorporate their facilities into regular patrol beats. For Lamp staff members, this open-door policy was highly counterproductive for organizational success, as it presented the potential to quickly erode the environment of trust and safety that that Lamp strove to facilitate for those residents who might still be involved with drugs while working toward their eventual recovery. Similar to other organizations embracing a "harm reduction" approach, Lamp strives to allow clients to progress through recovery at their own pace, concentrating on minimizing the harmful effects of drug use, rather than demand immediate and total abstinence from clients who may not yet feel ready for such requirements.

Given this approach, Lamp's continuing presence in Skid Row presented a direct threat to the organizational success of the mega-shelters, causing the leadership of these facilities to engage in two lines of stinging public critiques. First, Lamp and the mega-shelters were in direct competition for public funding and contracts from government agencies such as the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and the L.A. County Department of Mental Health (LADMH). These contests over resources – which remained relatively informal and confined to staff-meetings and closed-door sessions within the respective facilities – came to a head

beginning in 2009, taking on a very public character upon the development of the “Home for Good” Homeless Initiative by the L.A. County Board of Supervisors. The Home for Good plan takes \$230 million (from the current \$875 million) of the city’s federal, state, and local homeless funding and reallocates those resources to permanent supportive housing and organizations embracing the housing first model. In doing so, the plan explicitly held up long-standing Skid Row organizations like the Skid Row Housing Trust and Lamp as the exemplars of a revised strategy to “solve” homelessness (Zavis 2011).

Upon learning of these resource reallocations, representatives of the mega-shelters voiced strong opposition. Andy Bales of the Union Rescue Mission, for example, authored a series of newsletters on the URM. According to one of the early newsletters:

Lots of folks are pushing the Housing First model as a solution to homelessness. Recently an LA County Supervisor encouraged the business community to move all their resources into Housing First and away from other, as one spokesperson described, “archaic” models. ... The Housing First model – permanent supportive, *forever subsidized care* – is certainly the best model for people who are physically and mentally challenged; for those who will likely never recover from the devastating effects of homelessness. These precious folks make up about 10 to 20% of people experiencing homelessness. ... They are those that choose...to move to permanent supportive housing, or, what I would describe as, “Survival and Subsidy.”

The next 60%, the largest portion of people experiencing homelessness, are struggling with a mountain of issues. But those issues may very well be temporary, or at least not insurmountable. This is where life-transforming programs take the stage. Long-term, intensive programs that take place at the Union Rescue Mission, Los Angeles Mission, Weingart Center, Midnight Mission, and even our Hope Gardens Family Center, provide folks an opportunity to work hard and a chance to turn their life around.

The final 20% are folks like our first-time homeless families in our Project Restart program. ... They possess job skills and resources to quickly get back on their feet, get back into the job market and into the normal housing market. Housing First's permanent supportive-permanently subsidized housing will not only be inappropriate for them, but it would in the end be debilitating to their genuine well being.<sup>29</sup>

In his statements, Bales makes the clear assertion that while housing first organizations like Lamp are capable of addressing the needs of only 20% of homeless individuals at most, the comprehensive services provided by the URM is capable of addressing the needs of at least 80% if not all of homeless needs. In this light, Bales consistently refers to the housing first model as "forever subsidized care," "survival and subsidy," and "permanently subsidized housing." Bales directly contrasts the non-coercive approach taken by organizations like Lamp with the URM's

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<sup>29</sup> Andy Bales, "Housing First Push," June 4, 2009. <http://www.urmblog.org/category/rev-andys-blog/2009/06/> Accessed January 27, 2010.

emphasis on self-transformation, retraining, and reintegration that seeks to quickly curtail clients' dependence on public funds.

In the second and intertwined critique, the mega-shelter coalition further attacked Lamp as dangerously counterproductive, not only to the individuals whose personal characteristics make them incompatible with the organization's model, but also to the safety and general well-being of the Skid Row neighborhood more broadly. The result, according to Bales, was "a growing desperation on Skid Row in Los Angeles, a doubling of the number of people [on the streets] and an increase in crime."<sup>30</sup> For Bales and others, the mechanism at work in this downward spiral was the fact that Lamp provided living conditions that were "too comfortable" to promote sustained personal transformation, and as a result enabled unhealthy lifestyle choices and contributed to a pervasive "shelter resistant" culture. In the words of Carrie Gatlin, vice president of Eimago (the secular arm of the URM that accepts public funding), in an email to Andy Smith, captain of Central Division, "People ... are resistant because they are not yet uncomfortable enough in their misery to get the help they need to start making healthy choices for themselves."<sup>31</sup> Orlando Ward of the Midnight Mission, himself a former homeless drug addict, echoes this sentiment, writing that "My personal experience is that when it started getting really uncomfortable for me on the streets ... I had to make a real hard decision on what I was going to do for the rest of my life" (Fausset 2005).

Without making conditions uncomfortable enough to spur better lifestyle choices, these voices accused Lamp of providing a "breeding ground" for vice and crime. As Bales detailed in a later online newsletter:

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<sup>30</sup> Andy Bales, "The Reality on Skid Row Since Home for Good," February 11, 2012. <http://www.urmblog.org/category/rev-andys-blog/2012/02/> Accessed February 15, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Email from Carrie Gatlin to Andy Smith and others, October 19, 2006.

[C]rime has moved into the permanent-supportive housing projects. ... Leaders of gangs heading up drug sales move in, take over several apartments, require residents to package and sell drugs under the threat of violence. It has been reported by reputable sources that some leaders of these housing groups actually dissuade their employees from reporting the crimes or cooperating with police. I have met people on the street, displaced from their permanent-supportive housing units by the violence inside of these poorly managed housing complexes. When we gathered for the annual memorial of those who had died on the streets of Skid Row, the longest list of names of those who had died came from within these permanent supportive housing complexes.<sup>32</sup>

As evidence of their close organizational relationship, mega-shelters accusations were increasingly echoed by LAPD representatives. For example, during an afternoon of fieldwork in May of 2009, I encountered one of Central Division's Senior Lead Officers – one of SCI's "homeless coordinators" – distributing leaflets and flyers instructing neighborhood inhabitants of this contention, instructing them to avoid Lamp's facility. One particular leaflet in part reads:

[Tenants] have expressed to me that they desire a stronger police presence to deal with the criminal element that live in and loiter around the buildings they are trying to rehabilitate in. But other tenants tell me that they have always wanted to speak out about the conditions that they were forced to live in, but intimidation

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<sup>32</sup> Andy Bales, "Don't Let Skid Row Return to Lawlessness," January 26, 2010. <http://www.urmblog.org/category/rev-andys-blog/2010/01/> Accessed January 27, 2010.



plays a role in suppressing their ability to speak out. They also advised me that some managers have a very anti-police attitude; they would rather give those that break the law the freedom to engage in overdosing, narcotics sales, and prostitution. It is all done under the mantra of “harm reduction,” rather than providing a real improvement to the quality of life within locations designed to provide a safe haven for those trying to conquer their addictions and have a sustained sobriety.

As a result, many of these hotels go unchecked because the managers and advocacy groups who say they are the voices of skid row give the perception to law enforcement that they do not desire our assistance in separating the wolves from the sheep in their buildings. . . . To hotel management who refuse to report these criminals or deter them from entering their facilities under the guise of civil liberty, shame on you. Your political world view is not as important as helping individuals better their lives and ensuring they are safe where they live.<sup>33</sup>

Extending well beyond the streets, the statements in the leaflets appeared verbatim in the Central Division newsletter hosted on the LAPD online homepage. The argument also appeared in a front page story of the *Los Angeles Times* that referred to Lamp as a “haven” for drugs. In the article, prominent public officials – including Councilwoman Jan Perry – questioned Lamp’s organizational philosophy and openly doubted the organization’s future contributions to the neighborhood (Bloomekatz 2009).

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<sup>33</sup> Deon Joseph, “The Freedom to Think for Yourself,” May 14, 2009.

For Lamp's senior leadership, the growing hostility toward the organization was a direct response to Lamp's stance on the Safer Cities Initiative and related Skid Row policing policies.

According to one senior staffmember:

It's really absurd the kinds of things that people are saying about this organization right now. The *Times* article is just uninformed. There is no doubt in my mind that these things are being said because of our stance on SCI [Safer Cities Initiative], and because we spoke out about the way the police treat Lamp's residents. They've made it pretty clear: If you criticize us, you'll pay the price. It's intimidation plain and simple. Now they send cars around in front of the Lodge and the Village just to mess with anyone who comes outside. It's people just standing there visiting with their friends or having a cigarette. They come by and shake them down, put them up against the wall, search their pockets, and just harass them. It's like they're punishing them because Lamp isn't one of their cheerleaders.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, through the historical making and unmaking of Skid Row coalitions, inter-organizational struggles over resources, funding, and recovery ideologies play out in the realm of policing. Social welfare issues become policing issues. For example, monthly community policing meetings, purportedly existing to formulate strategies to address neighborhood crime, regularly and quickly evolved into arguments over the appropriateness of the competing service models, pitting Lamp's housing first approach against the intensive rehabilitation of the mega-

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Lamp senior staff member who asked to remain anonymous, February 27, 2012.

shelters. In these and other public forums, justifications for one model or the other were reframed, shifting evaluation away from each approach's effectiveness in providing vital services and support, to a question of which model was the most effective in reducing criminal behavior throughout the neighborhood as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

While long-acknowledging broken windows policing as a “place-based” crime control strategy, explicitly designed to alter the meanings that people assign to particular urban spaces and behaviors, researchers have overwhelmingly ignored the processes by which place is produced and the role of policing in this enterprise. Instead, scholars have relied on popular terms such as “globalization,” “deindustrialization,” and “gentrification” to casually and *causally* explain policing campaigns like the Safer Cities Initiative. Yet, following Katz (2010), these explanations have a tendency to miss the historical trajectories and sequences that are necessary for understanding contemporary neighborhoods, local struggles over the spatial order, and the resulting police policies and practices.

To overcome these limitations, I grounded my explanation of the Safer Cities Initiative in events taking place during a historical era well before its launch in 2006, in order to uncover social mechanisms and power dynamics typically left out of other studies. I refocused attention on the efforts of neighborhood actors who, from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, attempted to cement Skid Row as a stable, residential community. Throughout this period, the efforts of the Catholic Worker coalition has the unintended consequence of creating the very conditions that led not only to the relocation and rise to prominence of Skid Row's three current mega-shelters,

but also to the mega-shelters' close collaboration with downtown business leaders, city officials, and the LAPD. Beginning in the 1990s, these interests supplanted the Catholic Worker coalition as the dominant representative "voice" of Skid Row, authoring a revised set of policing mandates within the neighborhood. By the early 2000s, even before the official launch of the Safer Cities Initiative, these interests enlisted LAPD's Central Division to fundamentally reorient their daily patrols to act as front-line outreach workers, now responsible for making the neighborhood conducive to intensive rehabilitation and eventual exit from the neighborhood. Officers were primarily enlisted to assist in shepherding potential clients into the mega-shelters' recovery programs.

Adopting an approach that is more equipped to capture the historical processes involved in the production of place, I have presented a rather surprising finding. While scholars have overwhelmingly decried policing campaigns like the Safer Cities Initiative as wholly exclusionary, and even "genocidal" (Mitchell 2001), I demonstrated that Skid Row policing has become intimately tied to rehabilitation and social inclusion; ideals theorized as antithetical to broken windows policing. In the next chapter I move from the historical and organizational level to examine street-level interactions between officers and neighborhood inhabitants to show that far from resulting in a decrease in police repression, this new therapeutic form of policing has the effect of widening the net of coercive control, creating a situation in which entirely new sets of behaviors and sub-populations – that may not necessarily be in violation of any law – become subject to intensified police surveillance and intervention.

## CHAPTER TWO

From “Rabble Managers” to “Recovery Managers”:

### Therapeutic Policing in Action

On February 23, 2010 I sat across from Sergeant Pete Foster in his small office on the second floor of the Central Division station. A few months earlier, Sergeant Foster had instituted a taskforce to enforce Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) 41.59 – a prohibition against aggressive panhandling – using undercover officers positioned at nearby ATMs, liquor stores, and parking lots. Foster invited me to his office on this day to discuss the logistics of the taskforce. After an hour, however, our conversation veered to a number of unrelated topics. A twenty-two year veteran of the force, Foster laughed loudly as he shared several stories with me about Skid Row policing “back in the day.” “I’ll tell you what,” he said with a smile, pointing to the outdated paint scheme that covered the walls of the station. “This place was the best kept secret in the department. This was definitely the most fun division. It’s gotten kind of boring now though. I remember the first day I came down here as a rookie in 1991. No squad cars. Just foot patrols. You would just walk out of the station with just your hat and your baton and your ticket book in your back pocket. And at the end of the day I would come home sore. My hands would be all cut up and scratched, and my uniform would be all torn up and ripped from spending the whole day breaking up fights. Back then, we wouldn’t really arrest people. That wasn’t what we were there for. We were just trying to keep people off of each other.” Foster went on to contrast his early patrol experiences with the conditions he currently faced, including a reliance on squad cars and a higher rate of arrests.

In the last chapter I detailed the historical development of policing in Skid Row, paying specific attention to a dramatic shift in patrol imperatives that took place at the close of the twentieth century. As Sergeant Foster's nostalgia illustrates, this shift was certainly not lost on those working the Skid Row beat. Foster was just one among a handful of veteran Central Division officers that spoke of the "new" ways of controlling Skid Row brought on by the adoption of the broken windows policing philosophy. In this chapter, I move from the historical to the ethnographic level in order to more systematically examine the extent of these shifts as they unfolded on the street. To do so, the chapter is structured as an "ethnographic revisit" (Burawoy 2003) to the Skid Row of the twentieth century as presented most famously in Egon Bittner's (1967) foundational work, "The Police on Skid Row: A Study of Peacekeeping." According to Burawoy (2003), a revisit "entails an intensive comparison of one's own field work with a prior ethnography of the same site, usually conducted by someone else" (650). In contrast to replication – which seeks to identify similarities between different cases – the point of the revisit is to discover variation between a current and former time period, pinpointing how local processes take on different forms and meanings because of changes in historical context.

A revisit to Bittner's ethnographic work provides a number of analytical advantages. First, as the most detailed and comprehensive account of the former model of Skid Row policing, Bittner's (1976) findings constitute a vital benchmark against which differences observed in the contemporary context may be more accurately understood. Without a revisit, it is difficult to accurately pinpoint what truly is "new" or extraordinary. Second, Bittner's (1967) Skid Row study provides the conceptual tools necessary for a grounded and in-depth analysis of policing *in practice*. A growing number of commentators have begun to call for more nuanced and differentiated approaches to the study of the "punitive turn" that are sensitive to the diverse and

complex forms by which broken windows policing is implemented by street-level actors (see Harcourt 2001; MacLeod 2002; DeVerteuil 2005; DeVerteuil et al. 2009; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010). As Johnsen and Fitzpatrick (2010) argue, the existing literature is “restricted almost exclusively to a critique of the *politics* and *principles* underpinning the punitive turn, rather than any in-depth exploration of its articulation (and contestation) via individuals and agencies ‘on the ground’” (1075, emphasis original). Thacher (2004) adds that there is a significant dearth of research providing detailed empirical accounts of what officers engaged in this form of policing *actually* do, analyzing what kinds of behaviors they target in which contexts, what constitutes a “broken window” in practice, and what steps officers take to “fix” neighborhood conditions.

After sketching a portrait of Bittner’s (1967) Skid Row, I compare the former era of policing with its contemporary expressions. I demonstrate that Skid Row patrols have transformed in significant and consequential ways. First, officers now perceive of, and act toward, the neighborhood and its inhabitants in a substantially revised manner. While officers in the twentieth century patrolled Skid Row as a “rabble zone” (Irwin 1985) – an urban district intended to quarantine incorrigibles deemed unfit to live in mainstream society – patrols are now designed to cement the neighborhood as a “recovery zone” – an urban district intended to reform or “cure” deviant and pathological citizens. Second, whereas former patrols were oriented around the “containment” and “preventive protection” of Skid Row denizens, these imperatives have become eclipsed by “recovery” and “reintegration” as the dominant lens through which officers understand and give meaning to the people, places, and situations they encounter. No longer acting as “rabble managers,” officers in today’s context have become “recovery managers.” Lastly, there has been a marked shift in officers’ calculations of what behaviors count as

problematic and the most appropriate police response – what Bittner (1967) termed the “ideal economy of intervention.” Given the revised conceptualization of Skid Row, police action is now weighed against its approximated efficiency in optimizing the rehabilitative capacity of the neighborhood and its ability to steer inhabitants onto a desired trajectory of recovery.

In detailing these transformations, I offer a much-needed empirical corrective to current research that tends to overemphasize the punitive and exclusionary underpinnings of this new social control paradigm. Rather than signal the death of rehabilitative and reintegrative aims, broken windows policing may actually facilitate their re-legitimation as part of a new brand of “therapeutic policing.” I show that rather than exclusively utilize broken windows enforcement strategies and quality-of-life laws to invizibilize and expel problem populations from urban space, officers also draw on these interventions to restructure aggregate neighborhood conditions such that problem populations will begin to “cure themselves,” altering deviant behavior through self-regulation and reasoned choices. In Skid Row, officers enlist broken windows enforcement to reconfigure the neighborhood’s social and physical ecology so as to funnel individuals toward more approved behavioral options and lifestyle choices centered on rehabilitative social services. It is critical to note, however, that the arrival of therapeutic policing does not necessarily signal a rise in compassion. My examination of Skid Row patrols suggests a widening of the net of coercive control, an increased legitimation of repression, and a situation in which entirely new sets of populations and behaviors have become subject to increase surveillance and regulation.

### **“Rabble Management”: Revisiting Bittner**



The mid-twentieth century marked a period of immense scholarly interest in the social life of Skid Row. By that time period, Skid Row was no longer characterized by the migratory labor, wanderlust, and protest explored in Nels Anderson's (1923) classic ethnography of "Hobohemia." Instead, the 1960s marked a shift to "an open asylum for alcoholics and the physically disabled (Rooney 1970: 18); a "reservation" for those the mainstream viewed as bothersome, offensive and threatening because of unconventional behavior, appearance, and "customs" (Wiseman 1970). Donald Bogue (1963: 405-406) described the neighborhood population as being "in the terminal phase of their affliction and after society at large has abandoned all hope for them and has ceased to rehabilitate them." By maintaining a permanent Skid Row, municipal governments developed the ability to quarantine what they viewed as uncorrectable pathologies while capping offensive social behaviors within a manageable territory.

The daily maintenance of this arrangement rested squarely in the hands of the local police department. Conducting interviews with officers at the time, William Mcsheehy (1979: 65-66) demonstrated that they deeply subscribed to this popular perception of Skid Row pathologies as unsolvable problems. In the words of one officer, "Nothing can be done." Another remarked, "[We] [c]an't do anything for them; they're through and will never be anything." Beyond perceiving the social conditions of the area as intractable and beyond departmental capacities, officers came to view certain forms of deviance as something expected in Skid Row.

Given this perception, Skid Row officers oriented their daily responsibilities around the task of "peacekeeping" (Bittner 1967) – a patrol model designed to maintain a tolerable, "normal" level of deviance, preventing Skid Row from exploding into a more serious municipal concern. Peacekeeping was composed of two primary imperatives. The first aim – *containment* –

involved preventing Skid Row's problems from escalating to a level at which they threatened to spill over into surrounding neighborhoods and interfere with the lives of "decent" citizens. The second goal – *preventive protection* – entailed precluding Skid Row's inhabitants from preying excessively on one another or on the reputable persons who might pass through the neighborhood's boundaries (Bahr 1973: 207). Importantly, peacekeeping was not intended to "clean up" or "cure" Skid Row's underlying problems, but rather to keep the area in a state of *relative* safety and tranquility with the least expenditure of manpower. Thus, rather than attempt to control excessive drinking per se, officers redirected their energy and resources to merely to mitigate the problematic consequences of such drinking behavior, whether in the form of a drunken brawl, a complaint by a nearby merchant, or general annoyance to mainstream public (Wiseman 1970).

Successful peacekeeping required that officers were permanently assigned to Skid Row beats, where they acquired a richly particularized knowledge of the people and places of the area (Bittner 1967: 707). Acting as "folk social scientists" (Paperman 2003: 399) this allowed them to quickly "read" any situation that they encountered (Reiss 1971), identifying and categorizing the relevant actors. As Bittner (1967) observed, officers claimed to have developed a "special sensitivity" to inhabitants' outward appearances – especially those physical qualities that would strike a casual observer as insignificant – that allowed an intuitive assessment of that individual's probable tendencies. In contrast to the "green" officer, the veteran accumulated intimate knowledge of "regulars" – "the chronic drunks of the area, as against a possible visitor (Wiseman 1970: 68) – and developed a historical perspective based on numerous past events about which an officer was able to cite names, dates, and places with precision. Wiseman (1970: 69) reported that in her interviews with veteran Skid Row patrolmen, they relayed extreme pride in their

“almost mystical” set of perceptive powers to “spot” certain types of people and particular precursors to problems. As one veteran officer reported, “I can tell an alcoholic from across the street.” Armed with this rich knowledge, officers made instant interpretations and carried out *ad hoc* decisions without the need to piece together facts through lengthy investigations.

Officers drew on their intimate knowledge of the environment to intervene in those instances in which they perceived inhabitants’ behavior to have surpassed the threshold of relative acceptability. In doing so, they adhered to what Bittner (1967: 713) termed an “ideal economy of intervention.” Because it was not feasible to arrest or coercively intervene into the lives of everyone on Skid Row who was behaving in a deviant manner, the ideal economy of intervention dictated that officers focus sanctions on the individual(s) whose presence was most likely to perpetuate trouble and disturb the neighborhood equilibrium. This often meant that individuals who were equally “guilty” under the law may not have been subject to intervention if the officer did not perceive them as equally troublesome in terms of containment or preventive protection. As Bittner (1967: 713) described:

Thus, when a patrolman ran into a group of four men sharing a bottle of wine in an alley, he emptied the remaining contents of the bottle into the gutter, arrested one man – who was no more or less drunk than the others – and let the others disperse in various directions.

In addition to intervening according to their interpretations of an individual’s likelihood to perpetuate trouble, officers drew on their intimate knowledge to evaluate an inhabitant’s level of risk, to both themselves to others. For instance, Skid Row officers might arrest a man in an

attempt to ensure his safety upon encountering him in a conspicuous location known to be frequented by “jackrollers” and other thieves. A number of Skid Row scholars report that officers frequently evaluated an individual’s distance from their domicile or other safe spaces when determining the need for intervention. Bittner (1967), for instance, observed that officers arrested men they confirmed were only “half drunk” and of little threat to neighborhood tranquility if they perceived him to be too far from home. Officers reasoned that as this individual continued to drink, he would soon be incapable of making it back to his room, and would most likely pass out in the road or in a secluded alleyway. Not only could this become a traffic or crime problem, but in the winter months the individual ran the risk of freezing to death. In this manner, officers’ determination of the plot of a situation, as well as their resulting intervention, contained an important spatial component. Whether apprehending a thief, separating an arguing couple, or arresting a Skid Row drunk, officers’ actions were largely designed to regulate inhabitants’ movements in space, which enabled or precluded certain behaviors (see Herbert 1997).

Officers rationalized the discretionary aspects of their coercive interventions – arresting certain individuals who were no more *legally* guilty than others, for example – by appealing to two widely shared beliefs. First, officers asserted that their actions had no real or long-term effect on Skid Rowers. While an arrest might disturb the life of a “normal” citizen, it was unlikely to blemish the Skid Row inhabitant’s social identity any more than the actions that brought him into this predicament already have. Further, given the “revolving door” (Spradley 1970) of the criminal justice system, an arrestee was often back on the streets, engaging in the same behavior within a matter of days, if not hours. Second, officers rationalized discretionary intervention by appealing to what Bittner (1967: 709) called the “restricted relevance of

culpability.” To the Skid Row officer, the Skid Row inhabitant was, by very nature, almost always guilty of *some* minor charge at any given time. As Jacqueline Wiseman (1970: 71) relayed, “To live on Skid Row literally means to live a life of drinking panhandling, and disturbing the peace.” The restricted relevance of culpability was exemplified in officers’ strategic use of municipal “drunk ordinances.” At the time, municipal codes listed prohibitions against the physiological state of being intoxicated.<sup>35</sup> While the vagueness of these types of ordinances caused a range of administrative problems – stemming from the fact that it prohibited the *state* of intoxication rather than the *act* of drinking – it provided the Skid Row officer with a powerful tool to prevent the future escalation of trouble. As Bittner (1967) demonstrated, an officer could, with significant impunity, employ the drunk ordinance to serve a range of peacekeeping purposes. The most cited, and well-known of such uses was captured in the following scene, depicting a series of events leading to the arrest of a man named “Big Jim.”

A man in a relatively mild state of intoxication (by skid-row standards) approached a patrolman. ... He has been on the streets for several years and his name is “Dakota.” During the last few days, “Dakota” has been seen in the company of “Big Jim.” ... Occasionally, “Big Jim” goes on drinking sprees in the company of someone like “Dakota.” Leaving aside the consideration that there is probably a homosexual background to the association, and that it is not right that “Big Jim” should have to support the drinking habit of someone else, there is a

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<sup>35</sup> The language of the “Pacific City” drunk ordinance read as follows: “Every person who commits any of the following acts shall be guilty of disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor, who is found in any public place under the influence of intoxicating liquor, or any drug, or the combined influence of any intoxicating liquor or drug, in such a condition that he is unable to exercise care for his own safety or the safety of others or by reason of his being under the influence of intoxicating liquor and any other drug, interferes with or obstructs or prevents the free use of any street, sidewalk or other public ways” (Wiseman 1970: 70).

more important risk that if “Dakota” moves in with “Big Jim” he will very likely walk off with whatever the latter keeps in his room. “Big Jim” would never dream of reporting the theft; he would just beat the hell out of “Dakota” after he sobered up. When asked what could be done to prevent the theft and the subsequent recriminations, the patrolman proposed that in this particular case he would throw “Big Jim” in jail if he found him tonight and then tell the hotel clerk to throw “Dakota” out of the room. When asked why he did not arrest “Dakota,” who was, after all, drunk enough to warrant arrest, the officer explained that this would not solve anything ... As it turned out, “Big Jim” was not located that evening. But had he been located and arrested on a drunk charge, the fact that he was intoxicated would not have been the real reason for proceeding against him, but merely the pretext (709-710).

This scenario exemplifies Bittner’s (1967) assertion that when Skid Row police invoked the law – arresting “Big Jim” who was no *legally* guilty than “Dakota,” for example – they were not actually enforcing it, but rather using it as a resource to solve more pressing situational concerns. So widespread was this practice that officers viewed the arrest someone who had *merely* committed some minor offense as a naïve implementation of the law, containing elements of injustice. As Bittner (1967) emphasized, officers would often sanction those they determined were threats to containment and only *after the fact* would they make the decision which charge was the most applicable. This meant that in these interventions, officers were never enforcing the law for the law’s sake, but rather mobilizing the law as a strategic and coercive tool in the service of a larger, informal goal of quarantine.

Skid Row studies in the twentieth century demonstrated a sharp distinction between the containment and prevention functions of peacekeeping – acting “here and now” in the interest of maintaining relative tranquility and immediate order on the street – and the therapeutic functions of institutions like the rehabilitation clinic and local hospital – operating within a “future oriented” correctional model to turn Skid Row inhabitants into sober, healthy citizens (Wiseman 1970). While the occasional police intervention might have had the incidental effect of placing a Skid Row alcoholic in a more therapeutic setting, this goal was peripheral at best. In fact, as Spradley (1970) demonstrates, peacekeeping interventions were largely antithetical to the long-term rehabilitation of Skid Row denizens, in that coercive interventions often led to further material destitution and more intense commitment to the deviant Skid Row culture.

However, at the close of the twentieth century, as the LAPD’s developed a partnership with newcomer mega-shelters that were directed increasingly toward the “intensive rehabilitation” of inhabitants, Skid Row policing reversed its course, and took on an explicitly therapeutic orientation. I now turn to peacekeeping in its current-day formulations to more fully elaborate these shifts as they unfolded on neighborhood streets.

### **“Recovery Management”: Contemporary Policing in Skid Row**

In today’s Skid Row, the everyday task of regulating street-life remains squarely in the hands of the LAPD. However, there are significant and consequential revisions in how officers perceive of Skid Row and its population, patrol imperatives, and the ideal economy of intervention. As a result, rather than focus their strategic mobilization of the law primarily in the

service of containment, officers' coercive interventions are directed by a revised criteria founded squarely upon therapeutic aims.

*Skid Row as "Recovery Zone"*

Contemporary policing is conditioned by a new perception of Skid Row as a therapeutic "recovery zone" – a controlled social environment in need of constant manipulation such that its inhabitants may be reformed. For Central Division officers, the 2006 Safer Cities Initiative (SCI) was the first explicit manifestation of this new perspective, intentionally designed to reverse the conditions that defined Skid Row of the past. This sentiment, relayed uniformly in conversations with patrol officers, division leadership, and even the two chiefs of police during my field work was articulated most concisely in my conversations with the Central Division lieutenant in charge of the daily administration of SCI.

One morning the lieutenant and I sat alone, talking in the station's large conference room. "You see," she prefaced in her signature, serious tone, "the biggest problem we have down here is that people have come to see this place as a kind of free-for-all. Like they can just do whatever they want. Shoot up heroin, smoke crack, that kind of stuff all day long. They want to live a certain kind of lifestyle and think this is just the perfect place. But SCI is here to stop that exact kind of thinking, to put a halt to that lifestyle." "But how do you really change that?" I asked. "Well," she responded instantly, "the goal really, is to turn Skid Row into a place where people come to get better. A place that can make people better so that they can get out of Skid Row for good, and move on to live healthy lives like you and I. The kind of place where these horrible



things just won't happen. If you look around, the resources are here. People will come to learn that.”

I heard similar sentiments on a daily basis. I found that even those officers that had only recently been deployed in the area shared a historically-grounded argument. Prior to the launch of SCI, they conveyed, the conditions of Skid Row communicated a clear message to wayward individuals across the city, and across the country, that they may indulge their bad habits with little risk of punishment. As more people made this interpretation over time and moved into Skid Row, its neighborhood identity was compounded and crime spiraled out of control. Contemporary policing, designed to “stop that exact kind of thinking,” was intended to work at a deeper, psychological level, directly targeting the way that individuals came to understand neighborhood norms and behavioral expectations. If the current policing campaigns were successful, negative norms would be replaced by pro-social behavioral standards, reflecting ideas of what the neighborhood “ought” to be, given its new organizational infrastructure. In a later conversation, Los Angeles City Attorney, Carmen Trutanich, relayed this notion succinctly, stating that “There are just too many great services and resources here for this not to become a way-station for the down and out.”

Throughout my time conducting fieldwork on Skid Row's streets, I collected a number of newsletters authored by senior lead officers (SLO) that were intended to educate inhabitants of Central Division's underlying intentions to actualize this neighborhood transformation. One newsletter, distributed in early 2010, is particularly illustrative. The four page document, entitled “Skid Row: We Have Faith in You. It's Time to Have Faith in Us,” read:

Hello again Central City East (Skid Row). ... I along with my fellow officers have proven our desire to make your community a safe haven for many to rehabilitate and thrive. The Los Angeles Police Department Central Division has recognized that the majority of the community desires to make Skid Row a true community for individuals struggling with the disease of addiction, homelessness, and mental illness. ... I am asking for you to envision what your community can be if we are able to bar those with a desire to keep many on an endless spiral of addiction or self serving reasons. Our goal is to make the influence of the service provider community stronger than that of the drug dealers and gang members who prey on the community.

Think on this for a second. When your favorite celebrity is struggling with addiction and needs to “get clean” do they go to the night clubs to do so? Absolutely not, because the very temptations that drove them into a drug program are readily available to them there. In Skid Row, many individuals cannot afford to go to Malibu or the mountains for a secluded safe environment to change. But with your support, the police department along with the City Attorney’s Office can begin to make Central City East a place where people can have a better chance of taking their lives back from the grip of addiction.

Rather than remain an area set aside specifically for those intending to *engage* in alcohol and drug abuse, the new idea of Skid Row is one of an area in which individuals come to *cease* that behavior. As with other editions of his newsletters, the SLO made arguments for an explicit rebranding, apparent even in the use of alternating names by which he referred to the

neighborhood. He utilized the label “Skid Row” at times when he intended to denote past and present conditions, characterized by a spiraling “addictive state,” while referring to the neighborhood as “Central City East” – a far less symbolically-charged term – when proposing what Skid Row *could* be, provided that inhabitants continue their support of local criminal justice efforts. The SLO provided his readers with an idea of what Central City East might look like by drawing an analogy to the quiet and wealthy beach city of Malibu, California. For many Southern California residents, Malibu has become synonymous with drug treatment facilities that cater to well-to-do and newsworthy clients. It is this reputation that the SLO draws upon when he argues that Skid Row can eventually be recreated as what might be considered the “poor man’s Malibu.”

Officers thus re-envisioned Skid Row like a recovery facility expanded to the neighborhood scale, thereby repositioning themselves as outreach social workers or drug counselors, but with law enforcement powers. Yet, while officers’ perceptions of the neighborhood and their role in it took on a far more therapeutic character as compared to the former era of policing, officers continued to rely heavily upon intuitive assessments of Skid Row inhabitants’ probable tendencies. These assessments took on a particularly spatial quality.

### The Spatial Contours of Recovery

During Bittner’s (1967) time of study, officers frequently relied upon an inhabitants’ physical location in the neighborhood to “read” the threat any particular individual posed to the aim of containment. If a Skid Rower was encountered in a conspicuous location or too far from his domicile he was likely to be perceived to hold a greater risk of victimization or of generating

the conditions that led to trouble. Paralleling ethnographic accounts of staff members in recovery facilities, officers in contemporary Skid Row drew upon an inhabitant's physical locations within the neighborhood to interpret that individual's relative commitment to recovery. As detailed in Wieder's (1988) ethnography of an East Los Angeles halfway house, staff members imbued certain spaces in the recovery facility – such as a secluded bathroom or basement – with additional social significance, given the staffs' perceptions that these spaces increased the opportunities to engage in drug use and other problematic behaviors. Spatializing addiction and sobriety in this manner, staff members viewed the individuals and objects they encountered in these locations with increased suspicion. In short, they symbolically re-mapped their facilities in ways that facilitated their rehabilitative project. Throughout my field work, I found that Skid Row officers constructed similar cognitive maps, though again at the neighborhood scale, assigning new meanings to specific streets, intersections, and blocks based not only on the opportunities these areas provided to live out a negative lifestyle, but also on the physical and metaphorical distance from the three mega-shelters whose rehabilitation efforts officers aimed to optimize.

Constructing what I term a “geography of recovery,” officers spoke of and acted upon the neighborhood as though it existed in three distinct sections. The first, informally referred to by many in the neighborhood as “the Bottom,” corresponded to the eastern half of Skid Row, stretching five blocks from San Pedro Street to the neighborhood's eastern boundary at Central Avenue. The Bottom was made up primarily of light industry, seafood warehouses, and block-long storage yards lined with high brick walls and chain-link fences. The second section, referred to as “the Top” or the “institutional side,” corresponded to the western half of the neighborhood,

running from San Pedro Street westward to Skid Row's Main Street border.<sup>36</sup> This was the section closest to the core of downtown, bordering the resurgent financial district. Importantly, the Top was home to the majority of social services and the Central Division police station. The three mega-shelters, and the spaces located *inside* their walls, constituted the third section in the geography of recovery.

Officers directly referenced this geography of recovery in constructing the legitimate use of the neighborhood. To use Skid Row "correctly" was to advance along a specific trajectory through the hierarchy of Skid Row's sections – from the Bottom to the Top, in the direction of, and into one of the mega-shelters. Once there, the cognitive map of Skid Row took on a topographical quality. As an inhabitant demonstrated a commitment to improving their life through approved behavior, they increasingly moved away from street level, or "graduated," into one of the mega-shelters' residential programs on the upper floors. The top floors of these facilities represented the last stop in the optimum trajectory before an individual would be jettisoned out of Skid Row altogether and back into mainstream society. Thus, when officers spoke about "falling to the Skid Row lifestyle," they often turned their bodies to point in the direction of the Bottom. While sharing their impressions of the neighborhood population, officers sometimes reported "near" success stories, in which individuals had, in the words of one veteran officer, "made it all the way up to the third floor of the mission" before being "sucked down to the Bottom again."

Given the hierarchy of neighborhood spaces, an inhabitant's physical location served as an officer's most immediate resource when encountering a situation in which an individual's commitment to recovery required evaluation. An illustrative incident transpired one afternoon

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<sup>36</sup> While some officers may have been playing upon the sexual connotations of these terms, it was neither explicit nor apparent in their usage during my fieldwork.

outside of Gladys Park, which was located on the corner of Sixth and Gladys Streets, in the heart of the Bottom. I sat against the park's tall green iron fence, engaged in a conversation with two homeless men when a squad car slammed to a halt, and two officers I did not recognize approached and handcuffed a man standing thirty feet away. As I stood watching them search and question him, a second squad car, driven by two familiar officers, pulled to the curb. We exchanged greetings as they approached. They stood next to me and we spoke as a crowd began to form behind us. As we watched the detainment, it became clear that neither officer had concrete details, as the officers involved had not yet broadcast the actions over the radio. "Oh, is that Shorty?" one of the officers said to his partner and I. "Yeah, I've known this guy for a while. They call him Shorty. He used to be up at the program at the Midnight [Mission]. Sometimes we would get calls in there and I'd see him all the time. He seemed like he had his stuff together, engaged in the program, you know? He seemed like he was really close to getting out of this crap. But I guess he jumped ship and came back down here. Fell off the wagon I guess. It's a shame." With his realization, the officer walked over and spoke to the other officers who continued their interrogation. They exchanged brief words, but immediately loaded Shorty into their squad car and pulled away. When the officer returned, he indicated that he had urged the other officers to go ahead and book Shorty, rather than release him. "We'll see if this gets him back on track and his head on straight. He didn't have anything on him, but it looked like he was looking to score [buy drugs]."

As in other instances, I was surprised by how quickly the two support officers constructed an authoritative narrative prior to ever consulting with the initiating officers to determine the "plot" of the incident and the grounds of Shorty's detainment. Eventually utilizing this narrative to recommend Shorty's formal arrest, they treated additional investigation as

superfluous. Shorty, who was previously encountered in the premier recovery space was quickly deemed “out of place” in the Bottom. While Gladys Park is located only four blocks from the Midnight Mission, the officer’s nonchalant report demonstrated just how large officers perceived the distance between the two Skid Row spaces when comparing the attitudes and behaviors that either location was believed to engender.

As two polar sections of the neighborhood, presence either in the Bottom or within one of the mega-shelter facilities tended to produce straightforward interpretations of an inhabitant’s commitment to recovery. In comparison, officers tended to view the Top as an intermediate space, containing diverse, though often subtly differentiated stages of rehabilitation. Those encountered in the Top were viewed to be in a transitional state of self-transformation, evaluated as somewhere between total, and total lack of, commitment to the appropriate trajectory through the neighborhood. Some in this section may have been “on their way up” – having recently developed the requisite level of resolve necessary to pull themselves from the Bottom – or “on their way down” having previously been in a mega-shelter program but lost their way. In either case, the Top represented a critical neighborhood space where officers acted as though even the most minute event or seemingly-innocuous “nudge” could have the power to propel an inhabitant toward either reclamation or relapse. As one patrol officer stated, “The San Julian Corridor [an alternate title for the Top] is really where the action is. This is where we can really change people’s lives.” In the project of optimizing the rehabilitative capacity of the neighborhood, devoting effort to those encountered in the Top represented a pragmatic and economical strategy. Those on the doorsteps of a mission were perceived as more likely to enter the facility than those encountered several blocks away, who would be confronted by a barrage of obstacles – from deviant peers to run-ins with predators – if they attempted to journey through the neighborhood

to the same facility. As a result, while on patrol in the Top, officers interpreted inhabitants' relative levels of commitment in a far more prudent manner than was the case in other parts of the neighborhood.

This sensitivity was exemplified in the additional evaluative tools employed by officers to supplement any snap judgment based upon immediate spatial location. On such technique, referred to a "prowling" by many of my research companions, entailed the regular practice of driving slowly up and down the streets in the Top, interrogating pedestrians and giving them orders via the squad car's mounted public address (PA) system. Throughout fieldwork, I frequently observed officers "prowl" the streets adjacent to the mega-shelters multiple times per hour. The following excerpt from my notes illustrates this process:

Outside the courtyard of the Union Rescue Mission, a squad car pulled slowly up the street from the direction of the park. The lone officer in the car spoke loudly to those standing on the sidewalk through his PA system. "Attention ladies and gentlemen. There are people trying to get help here in the mission. If you want to get help you're welcome to be here. If not, if you want to poison yourselves and engage in criminal activity, you're going to have to leave the block. I will not let you interfere with their positive change. If you decide you want to get better, you can come back." The officer travelled to the corner, turned around and repeated his message. Several groups of people vacated the block while others quickly headed inside the URM. After the officer made three passes, only 5 people remained on the block.



In this manner, officers relied on their own presence as an interpretive resource, managing aspects of their visibility in order to provoke behaviors that could illuminate an individual's "true" intentions. This process was rooted in the belief that as officers were observing the behavior of inhabitants, inhabitants were closely observing the police. In the words of one SLO, who parked his car along San Julian Street and leaned against the hood watching those on the sidewalk for up to an hour at a time, "They watching me just as closely as I'm watching them. The last thing they want is for me or another officer to get between them and their next fix." Other officers offered that without even existing their squad car, they could determine "what somebody is up to" by watching who appeared fearful and headed to the Bottom versus those who remained or those who withdrew back into the doors of a mega-shelter.<sup>37</sup> The practice of prowling also highlights the manner in which officers viewed the more "recovered" sections as susceptible to encroachment and contamination. Only through diligent surveillance, quickly spotting infiltration by problematic individuals, could officers prevent the attitudes and behaviors in the Bottom from spilling into the Top.

### *Contemporary Policing Practices*

In the previous era of Skid Row policing, patrol practices – concerned primarily with the "here and now" of containment and preventive protection – were by no means intended to foster long-term modifications to inhabitants' behavior or sobriety. In fact, the patrol model that dominated the twentieth century often ran counter to the efforts of the small number of rehabilitation facilities located in the neighborhood (Spradley 1970). In the contemporary

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<sup>37</sup> A similar manipulation of visibility as a detective technique is observed by Paperman (2003) in her study of the Paris subway police.

context, however, with officers' perceptions of the neighborhood and their own role in the area centered on the aims of recovery, patrol practices became charged with a pronounced therapeutic character. Like in the previous era, Skid Row officers mobilized formal laws and police enforcement powers in the service of a larger, informal goal. Yet, not only had this goal shifted from quarantine to rehabilitation, but officers were now armed with an unprecedented level of coercive resources at their disposal. I observed five distinct patrol practices by which officers deployed these resources to explicitly manipulate the social environment in a manner intended to cause inhabitants to adopt attitudes and engage in behaviors that were more favorable to intensive rehabilitation: (1) impromptu detainments and interrogations, (2) punishing long-term residence, (3) enforcing constant physical movement through neighborhood space, (4) reducing the vulnerability of potential victims, and (5) constricting the availability of vital resources.

### Impromptu Detainments and Interrogations

Impromptu detainments and interrogations comprised the most frequent of officers' patrol practices and constituted the foundation upon which further coercive interventions rested. Throughout their daily patrols, officers utilized constant contact with inhabitants in order to determine individuals' relative levels of commitment to the desired trajectory of recovery. This information was shared with patrol partners and fellow Central Division officers to create a constantly updating knowledge base about the area's population. This practice closely paralleled the "motivational testing" documented by Sugarman (1967: 11) among staff members of residential recovery programs when conducting intake interviews of newly-arrived clients. Sugarman (1967) found that recovery program staff members screened potential residents to

determine their openness to treatment, the severity of their addiction, and their compatibility with the structure of the program. Skid Row officers similarly “tested” those they encountered on the relative degree to which they were willing to adhere to the norms of a rehabilitative Skid Row. In both the social model recovery program and the streets of Skid Row, motivational testing revolves around a central question in which the interviewer asks, “Why are you here?”

It is critical to note that officers’ motivational testing, as was the case with each of the therapeutic practices explored below, centrally rested upon the availability of stringent quality-of-life laws – prohibiting mundane acts such as sitting on the sidewalk, loitering, and jaywalking – and the broken windows patrol model – prescribing that officers readily and rapidly address these “disorderly” behaviors as serious concerns. With the threshold for interventions radically diminished, officers were capable of easily justifying any and all contact made with Skid Row inhabitants. While the policing statistics are staggering – recall that Central Division reported 9,000 arrests and 12,000 citations in the first year of the Safer Cities Initiative – these numbers are far from capable of accounting for the vast number of instances in which officers made contact with, detained, interrogated, and searched inhabitants without ever formally evoking the law. The precise number of such interactions – referred to as “stop-and frisks” by policing scholars (Gelman et al. 2007) and “catch-and-releases” by many of those living in the neighborhood – is difficult to quantify. When I requested these statistics from the LAPD I was informed that the department had no formal system for recording the frequency of these interactions. To date, the only attempt to quantify the prevalence of catch-and-releases came in a report published by the Los Angeles Community Action Network in 2010. Surveying 200 Skid Row inhabitants, the organization found that in the previous year the average number of detainments was 5.3 per person, with approximately 60% of individuals reporting that they had

been handcuffed and 75% reporting that they had been searched before being dismissed by officers.

I witnessed these detainments and interrogations first hand as I followed officers throughout the neighborhood. During one such occasion, a Central Division sergeant relayed the importance of these impromptu inquiries. “A big part of patrolling this area is debriefing the vast majority of individuals that [officers] come in contact with,” he stated. “After a while you start to learn people’s responses. You start to be able to recognize the people who have no good business being down here.” This notion that certain reasons for being in Skid Row were more legitimate than others is a primary measure by which officers came to understand their encounters with unfamiliar individuals. The lieutenant in charge of SCI relayed a similar response when I recalled the sergeant’s patrol strategy in a later interview. “Oh yes. We actively ask the reason why they are down here. Sometimes people will admit that they are here to drink in public and smoke dope. They really say this to us. The other ones, well, they’ll say something like they’re here ‘visiting friends.’ She used her hands to make quotation marks in the air and laughed softly. “Right, of course, because this is just such a great place to hang out, right? As if there weren’t better parks and places to do that in other parts of the city? You just really start to read between the lines about what they’re really up to. We can pretty much tell the people that are living here because they are genuinely trying, because of the concentration of the service providers and because they are righteously homeless. That is versus the individuals who want the lifestyle or are predators from outside of the area.”



Figure 15. Impromptu detainment and interrogation.

During interrogations, officers provided those they encountered various opportunities to present proof of their positive lifestyle and recovery choices. Skid Row's three mega-shelters regularly assigned identification badges when individuals entered their longer-term recovery programs. These badges typically included the name of the facility, a photo, the name of the program, and often a barcode or magnetic stripe. While these badges were designed primarily for regulating access in and out of the facilities, they also serve as a manner for inhabitants to essentially "carry" approved spaces with them when they ventured beyond the walls of the recovery facilities and into more questionable neighborhood spaces. When officers encounter inhabitants on the street and engaged in motivational testing techniques, they often asked if the individual possessed one of these identification badges. If so, many officers allowed them to remain in a given area while mandating that other individuals vacate. At other times, this was the only exception by which officers allowed individuals to remain standing in groups on the

sidewalks adjacent to the mega-shelters. As an SLO informed me as we stood nearby one such group outside of the Union Rescue Mission after checking their identification, “I don’t mind people coming outside in between their classes to smoke a cigarette, or maybe they are on a break to run an errand or check in with a case worker that’s trying to get them into housing. That’s really what they should be doing anyways. So we definitely don’t want to mess that up. Those people have demonstrated that they want to take the next step.” Observing officers as they interrogated entire groups of individuals for drinking in public or jay-walking, there were several occasions in which the officers granted leniency to those who produced mega-shelter identification badges, while detaining, citing, and even arresting those who could not.

For those deemed insufficiently committed to their rehabilitation and eventual “graduation” from Skid Row, officers mobilized (the threat of) the law to compel such individuals onto the desired trajectory of recovery. Yet, while contemporary officers possessed an unrivaled level of law enforcement resources in a neighborhood with an unprecedented saturation of rehabilitative opportunities, this task was constrained by a significant practical dilemma. As officers themselves admitted, recovery was not an automatic process, and was not guaranteed to occur simply because an individual had entered into the neighborhood’s boundaries. And while officers conceived of the mega-shelters as the primary solution to the area’s various problems, admission to one of these facilities remains strictly voluntary, requiring an active decision on behalf of potential clients.

My field notes are filled with conversations with officers in which they lamented that they lacked the legal authority necessary to physically deliver inhabitants to the mega-shelters, even if officers were able to prove that such actions were ultimately in the individual’s best interest. Compounding this difficulty, Central Division came under intense scrutiny in the wake

of a nationally-publicized scandal in 2005, in which local law enforcement agencies – including the Los Angeles Sheriffs Department and several nearby police departments – were discovered “dumping” parolees, addicts, mentally disabled, and homeless individuals on the doorsteps of the mega-shelters (DiMassa and Fausset 2005). Officers were now faced with the task of moving large numbers of inhabitants through Skid Row’s various sections and into recovery facilities despite these individuals may not have committed and major violations.

In an attempt to sidestep legal prohibitions against involuntary commitments, Central Division developed a means by which officers could *indirectly* compel inhabitants to initiate and remain committed to their own rehabilitation. This primarily entailed restructuring police contact in such a way that it could more effectively bring about self-regulation on the part of Skid Row denizens. As the SCI lieutenant stated, “Ultimately it’s our job to set the standard. There is really nobody else who is doing it. When you look out on the streets, most people have pretty much communicated to us that they aren’t willing to make good choices in their lives. So our job is to help them to make the right choice. If they don’t want to make the right choices to get better, to move up and out of here, then we have to step in. Nobody else is going to do it.”

Discussed in terms of helping individuals make “good choices” on their own, an ideal intervention in the contemporary context was one that was capable of altering the incentive structure believed to guide inhabitants’ everyday behaviors and decisions. In this, officers privileged those interventions they perceived as the most efficient in manipulating aggregate neighborhood conditions in such a way that members of the population would begin to choose rehabilitation over prolonged drug abuse, criminal behavior, and residence in Skid Row particularly in those instances in which officers were not physically present to compel this decision. To this end, officers attempted to cement a modified neighborhood ecology and culture

– perpetuated by a critical mass of self-regulating individuals – that funneled individuals toward the mega-shelters. As the SCI lieutenant argued, the police aimed to make recovery far more attractive than any other course of action. The remaining practices relied heavily on this logic.

### Punishing Long-Term Residence

Interpreting long-term residence with a lack of commitment to rehabilitation, officers employed practices intended to dissuade permanent settlement in the neighborhood. The most readily observable technique entailed the selective enforcement of quality-of-life laws to create graduated levels of penalties that corresponded to an individual's perceived duration in the area. This strategy was exemplified in officers' differential treatment of long-time inhabitants compared to those they perceive to be neighborhood "newcomers." Consider the following interaction.

One evening I stood on the corner of Sixth and Towne Streets, assisting a group of research companions as they assembled their tents for the evening. A middle-aged, greying and homeless African-American man named Charlie stood thirty feet away alongside a taller and younger African-American man, sipping from tall aluminum cans wrapped in brown paper bags. When the tents were nearly assembled, a squad car pulled slowly to the curb. I immediately recognized the officers. Officers Marshall and Diaz exited the car and approached Charlie and his companion. Officer Marshall called out, "Damn, Charlie, again? You know the drill. Pour out those beers." The two men snickered at the order but immediately began pouring the contents of their cans into the gutter. Addressing Charlie, Marshall continued, "I see you've got yourself a new drinking buddy over here. You planning on bringing this guy down with you?" "Aw man,



this is my homeboy,” Charlie replied with a large, intoxicated smile. Marshall looked toward the other man. “I haven’t seen *you* before. Tell you what. Let’s try to keep it that way, huh? Trust me, you don’t want to become this guy’s ‘homeboy.’” The officer paused, looked toward westward on Sixth street, and continued to address the younger man. “Why don’t you take off and leave your homie with us?” The officer pointed to the Midnight Mission as he reached for his handcuffs. The younger man appeared surprised at the officers orders, but promptly headed in the direction he was instructed. Officer Marshall called after him, “Don’t let me see you over here again, you hear?” The two officers turned their attention back to Charlie. Officer Marshall walked quickly to turn Charlie around, place him in handcuffs, and began to lecture him “We do this way too often, man. You ever going to learn?” Marshall patted him down. After running his name through a database for outstanding warrants, the officer wrote Charlie a citation for drinking in public. As the officers got back into their squad car, Marshall glanced back at Charlie and called out, “You know it’s going to be like this until you get your shit together. It’s your call!” Marshall closed his door and the squad car pulled away.

Officers’ handling of Charlie and his companion can be considered as a contemporary analog to the “Big Jim and Dakota” scenario depicted by Bittner (1967). Yet, while both scenes unfolded similarly, the men’s behavior and the officers’ responses took on very different meanings in the contemporary context. In both the previous and modern day contexts, the men and their companions were each equally guilty of the same misdemeanor crime and subject to equal punishments. Despite this, officers employed selective enforcement more in line with the ideal economy of intervention of the time. This meant that officers in Bittner’s (1967) Skid Row elected to arrest Big Jim rather than Dakota because they perceived Big Jim’s arrest as the most economical use of police means to achieve the ends of containment and preventive protection.

Given the therapeutic character of contemporary interventions, Officers Diaz and Marshall elected to excuse the newcomer with a simple warning while detaining, handcuffing, searching, and ultimately ticketing Charlie in an effort to kick start both men onto a desired trajectory of rehabilitation.

Officers' differential treatment of inhabitants should be understood as a conscious, intentional, and consistent attempt to contrast the benefits of efficiently moving through the trajectory of recovery with the consequences of prolonged residence in the area. The SCI lieutenant was one of the many officers I observed who emphasized that as permanent settlement became increasingly costly and uncomfortable, individuals would eventually come to view rehabilitation in a far more favorable light. This applied to all those, regardless of material status, who might consider Skid Row a permanent home. "You have to remember," she instructed me, "that in this area we have homeless *and* housed people. We have a lot of people living in transitional housing units. But the key word there is *transitional*. The goal is to get these people moving into more stable situations, and to get other people moving into those units so that they can have a chance at a better life. We really don't want to see people camped out on these sidewalks for years on end, and we don't want people to stay in those units for years on end. That's not what these services are here for. The problem is that a whole lot of people who came down here to shoot up and hang out get cemented in that lifestyle. That becomes a big problem for us that we have to really target."

Enforcing Constant Physical Movement

While graduated penalties were intended to dissuade residence in the long term, officers' temporal construction of Skid Row prompted additional techniques designed to impede settlement in a more immediate sense. Central Division officers advanced a general theory in which inhabitants took up criminal behaviors predominantly at those moments in which they became idle or sedentary. In response, officers turned once again to quality-of-life laws, in particular LAMC 41.18(d) – a prohibition against sitting, lying, or sleeping on a public sidewalk – to maintain constant physical movement throughout the neighborhood's public spaces. A 2006 newsletter distributed by the SLO to the population near the mega-shelters concisely captured this process:

When I began enforcing the sidewalk ordinance in my area it had less to do with sitting or sleeping on the sidewalk. In reality it had to do with the crime it produced. In Skid Row, most people are not sitting or sleeping for “life sustaining” reasons. During the day, many are sitting so they can use narcotics. When they are sleeping, it is more likely due to crashing from a four-day cocaine binge or a bad heroin overdose. ... There are excellent programs on Skid Row to help the homeless beat their addiction, but when drug dealers are waiting right outside their doors, it's difficult for [inhabitants] to succeed.

While officers may have intervened to technically enforce the sidewalk ordinance, the SLO intimated that officers intentionally invoked such laws to accomplish alternative goals. Enforcing the ordinance allowed officers to preclude, if only for a short period, the consumption

opportunities necessary to establish and intensify alcohol and drug addictions. In the words of one patrol officer, “It’s pretty damn hard to spark your crack pipe when you’re busy walking.”

This contention was consistently relayed throughout patrols, and was a dominant theme during the monthly “Skid Row Safety Walk,” led by representatives from Central Division, the mega-shelters, and nearby Business Improvement Districts. During one such walk, a senior officer informed me and a small group of participants on the necessity for officers to intervene when they encountered “stagnant” individuals. “So this is what we’re up against,” he called out, walking backwards to face us but pointing to a group of men who were standing in a small circle a half block away on the corner of Crocker and Sixth Streets. “You see all these guys just hanging around, just sitting there? This group spells trouble. Unfortunately this is the kind of stuff that takes up a lot of our time.” He turned his body to simulate having a conversation with the men on the corner. “*You* know that you have no business just sitting here, and *we* know you have no business sitting here, so we’re going to stay on your butt. It’s for your own good, so get up. We’re not letting anybody relapse just because they decided to stop and chit-chat with their old smoking buddies.”



Figure 16. A group of men “idling” outside of the Union Rescue Mission.

These statements illustrated the ease by which Central Division officers perceived inhabitants to be diverted from recovery. To shepherd individuals along the trajectory of rehabilitation thus necessitated an elevated suspicion and constant intervention into the seemingly-innocuous routines of daily life – exemplified by the need to prevent even the most mundane congregations of peer for “chit-chat” along the sidewalk. In time, individuals would be made too uncomfortable to take up these disapproved behaviors, and seek out those activities that are less likely to result in police sanctions and hassle. Addressing a small audience attending a monthly community safety walk, a Central Division captain elaborated on this logic more fully. “Just imagine that you were getting woken up every single time you decided to drink too much. Come tomorrow, you might re-think climbing back into that bottle. In time, you’re going to seek out somewhere warm and safe, somewhere like the Midnight Mission, where you’re not going to

have an officer breathing down your neck. When you start getting help you'll understand why we did what we did.”

### Reducing the Vulnerability of Victims

This logic extended to a third strategy of recovery management, in which officers redirected their interventions toward potential victims. I regularly observed officers employing aggressive broken windows policing tactics to target “vulnerable” and “non-offending” inhabitants despite the immediate presence of more serious crimes and offenders.

During one illustrative incident, the SLO directed his interventions toward what appeared to be the *least* criminal individual on the block. I stood on San Julian Street in front of the Union Rescue Mission, conversing with the officer near his parked squad car as he sporadically paced up and down the sidewalk occasionally offering his warning to pedestrians to head into the mission or else vacate the area. When I had arrived twenty minutes earlier, I counted approximately 150 individuals on this single block. As the SLO paced, groups of individuals made their way to either end of the block or across the street, further away from his squad car. After several minutes, however, the SLO crossed the street to follow one such group. I too followed closely behind him. When he arrived on the opposite curb he stopped in front of an African-American woman who appeared to be in her seventies, sitting on one of the collapsible stools that were very common in the area. She rested her walking cane across her lap. As the officer approached, two men that were seated on the nearby curb immediately stood and walked quickly in either direction. After exchanging a quick, though polite greeting, the SLO addressed the woman. “Alright ma’am. I need you to fold up the chair and move along. I can’t have you

sitting here.” The woman sat unmoving, dismissively shaking her head as she stared of into the distance. The SLO addressed her again. “Ma’am, I’m not going to ask you again. I’m going to cite you for sitting on the sidewalk if you don’t get up and move along.” This seemed to have some effect, and as the woman slowly stood up she began to yell at him. “See, this is bullshit. Why are you messing with me for? All these other people are doing the same exact thing. Can’t you see that I need to sit down? Why don’t you go and arrest some of these crack dealers selling shit right in front of your face?” She pointed to a small group of African-American men standing in a small circle roughly forty feet away. The SLO replied in a calm tone. “I know ma’am. We’re doing everything we can to lock these guys up for good. But we also know that they’re violent people, and I can’t be out here to keep them in check all night. I don’t want anything bad happening to you.” With this, the woman turned and began walking up the sidewalk, cursing the officer under her breath. BY the end of this brief interaction, the number of pedestrians on the block was reduced to half its original number.

The SLO’s intervention extended not only extended beyond enforcement of the sidewalk ordinance, but also beyond the strategy of promoting constant physical movement. By mandating that this particular woman stand up and move along, the SLO was manipulating the larger ecology of criminal behavior. He drew on available law enforcement tools – in this case the *threat* of enforcing the sidewalk ordinance – to prevent the two necessary components of a crime – a vulnerable victim and a potential offender – from occupying the same physical space for too long of a period. Importantly, as indicated by the departure of roughly 75 *other* individuals who were previously standing on the block, the SLO’s actions served to mobilize even those who were not subject to direct police contact. This was all accomplished without issuing a single citation, carrying out a single arrest, or otherwise activating the formal legal system. The SLO

and other officers advanced this tactic as a more viable and less resource intensive option than limiting interventions solely to those doing the victimization. “We don’t have the numbers down here that we would have in a perfect world,” a patrol officer conveyed to me after I questioned why, in the midst of thirty individuals standing near an intersection he chose to detain, handcuff, and search an elderly man who required a cane to cross the street. “So we have to be smart every time we stop somebody out here. Other people are watching to see what they can get away with. The cracks in the armor, you know?”

While victim-oriented patrol techniques may initially appear to be oriented primarily toward preventing crime, officers advanced these measures as holding a fundamentally therapeutic quality. This point was conveyed strongly by one of Central Division’s captains during a community-impact meeting. “The reality is that what some people think is harassment is actually a great way to stop somebody from getting raped, or robbed, or turned into an addict. The safer we keep people, the easier it is for us to get them integrated into the services they need. The bad guys are looking for the easiest target on the block, so the pressure you see us putting on people just sitting around is to create an atmosphere that’s bad for business. They’ll have to find some other way to support themselves, and there’s no shortage of great alternatives down here.”

While Skid Row patrols in the mid-twentieth century were directed toward the preventive protection of vulnerable inhabitants, it was primarily carried out for the sake of keeping Skid Row and its associated problems off the larger municipal radar. The captain’s statements indicated that in today’s context, however, preventive protection was carried out in large part to increase the attractiveness and effectiveness of the mega-shelters. First, individuals who had been victim to violent crimes – such as robbery or sexual assault – may be more likely to develop psychological barriers to self-admission. As a patrol officer instructed me after dispersing a



group of women congregating on a busy street-corner, “The longer these women are down here, the more they get abused, the more they start to lose trust in people because everyone takes advantage of them.” Accordingly, a lack of trust significantly inhibited the appeal of the neighborhood’s predominant rehabilitative programs, which require that clients develop close relationships with case-workers and peers. Second, the captain’s statements echoed the frequently-articulated notion that by reducing the availability and vulnerability of victims, and thus creating “bad business conditions” for criminal enterprise, even those who victimized other inhabitants would be enticed to seek easier and more legitimate opportunities, some of which might include admission into a recovery program as a more attractive course of action.

#### Constricting the Availability of Vital Resources

Police strategies intended to incentivize self-admission into the mega-shelter facilities were not limited solely to interventions with potential clients. Central Division officers enlisted an additional technique aimed at non-inhabitants seen as *facilitating* incorrect choices. Just as Skid Row has long attracted impoverished and homeless populations from across the region, it has also become a draw for independent philanthropic and religious organizations aiming to provide in-kind assistance, usually in the form of food and water. Recall from the previous chapter that in 2003, Los Angeles City Councilmember Jan Perry joined with mega-shelter representatives and downtown business leaders to introduce a motion that would have made philanthropic “street giveaways” in Skid Row a misdemeanor offense. While her multiple efforts were still unsuccessful by the time of my fieldwork, the LAPD found indirect means of enforcing the prohibition. Beginning most intensely in 2010, Central Division conducted regular sweeps

alongside inspectors from the Los Angeles County Department of Health to locate anyone engaged in street giveaways to issue them citations, orders to cease activities, and notices to appear in court. In doing so, Skid Row police were able to quickly curtail inhabitants' ability to obtain vital resources *outside* of the approved rehabilitative facilities, thus eliminating any competing behavioral choices available in the neighborhood.

As a number of the charitable groups took steps to avoid health code violations by reforming their food service procedures, Skid Row police turned to alternate interventions. As some groups brought folding chairs, erected tables, or created piles of clothing while distributing resources, officers utilized LAMC 41.18(a) – a municipal code forbidding anyone from “unreasonably interfering with the free passage of pedestrians” – to ticket groups for obstructing the sidewalk and to order them to cease their activity. Central Division also began relying on more subtle and preemptive measures to limit the ability of groups to engage in donations. Over the course of several weeks, the city painted a large percentage of the curbs in Skid Row red, and erected accompanying “no parking” signs. Almost overnight, parking had been prohibited across entire blocks of Skid Row that were, only hours prior, lined heavily with cars. According to the Central Division captain at that time, new parking regulations were enacted with a specific aim of disallowing groups to transport large amounts of goods into the neighborhood. Without the ability to park near the recipients of their charities, these groups were forced to either park outside of Skid Row and transport large amounts of clothing or blankets by foot or relocate their efforts to different neighborhoods altogether.

Within two months, the majority of the groups that had been fixtures along Skid Row sidewalks – for some of these groups since the time of Bittner's (1967) observations – largely disappeared. Several of the remaining groups pressured Central Division leadership into a series

of meetings. I sat in the conference room jotting field notes on the discussions that ensued. After hours of dialogue, the two sides found themselves unable to reach a compromise. This was largely attributable to the fact that while the police were technically enforcing health codes and pedestrian ordinances, their interventions were intended for a purpose that extended well beyond the immediate issues of food safety and sidewalk access upon which the charitable groups remained focused.

As the Central Division captain brought the first meeting to a close, an SLO in attendance was explicit about the rationale underlying their campaign. “I understand the desire to give, but these do-gooders are actually a part of the problem. The bottom line is that as long as these people seek their needs in the street, there is no incentive to go to an organized, structure facility to possibly better themselves. They have the potential to enter a program and get their lives together, rather than eating in the street where they can continue to destroy themselves with the narcotics available on the street.”

Other officers communicated that with continued success in eliminating giveaways along the sidewalks, the police could better limit inhabitants’ ability to physically sustain themselves without entering a mega-shelter. Within a short period, they reasoned, inhabitants’ growing hunger would cause them to reconsider self-admission into a mega-shelter program as increasingly attractive as it would become one of the only options available for securing inexpensive or free meals. I spoke with several officers after they swept a corner clean of a religious group providing sandwiches to a long line of homeless people that had assembled in a long line along the sidewalk. One of the officers’ comments on the dangers of “street philanthropy” were illustrative. “This shouldn’t be a vacation down here for people,” he emphasized. “To an extent you could say a part of our job is to make this place as uncomfortable

as possible so that people finally hit rock bottom and get themselves into a mission.”

Eliminating street giveaways was thus designed to quite literally starve Skid Row inhabitants into rehabilitative programs.

### **Remaking Skid Row and its “Typical” Inhabitants**

Through their revised perceptions of the neighborhood space and their corresponding patrol practices, officers generated a radically revised, normative construction of Skid Row and the kinds of individuals “typically” found there. Feeding back upon itself, these constructions were reinforced and further actualized with each subsequent detainment, interrogation, citation, or arrest. In short, new ways of thinking about Skid Row and new ways of policing Skid Row became mutually reinforcing.

Each of the patrol practices detailed above rested upon an underlying assumption that Skid Row existed as an *instrumental* space, characterized by a single and appropriate “use”. As a result, Skid Row officers held physical presence in Skid Row to a very different standard than that typically found in other areas of the city that were assumed to have a more permanent residential status and a non-instrumental purpose. Whereas the same lines of questioning and interrogation techniques might bring a range of probable and appropriate responses from those living in other Los Angeles neighborhoods, the drive to enforce Skid Row as an instrumental space transformed seemingly-innocuous reasons for being found in the area – like “visiting friends” – into statements that evoked suspicion, warranting further police investigation and intervention. This construction of Skid Row also meant that instead of looking upon and treating those found in the area as neighborhood “residents,” officers encountered these individuals as

neighborhood “users.” Officers’ notions of the correct “use” of Skid Row thus became a central criteria for looking upon the neighborhood and determining what people and behaviors were most “disorderly” and constituted the “broken windows” most in need of fixing.

Whereas officers in the twentieth century sorted the Skid Row population primarily in terms of their perceived threat to containment, officers in the contemporary context categorized and judged the various segments of the population according to how effectively they were perceived to utilize the neighborhood’s resources to propel their own recovery. In this, officers maintained a hierarchy of users. On one end of the spectrum were “legitimate” users, who officers evaluated to have a sincere and demonstrated intention of quickly entering a rehabilitation facility and eventually exiting the neighborhood for good. While officers overwhelmingly explained an individual’s “fall” to Skid Row as a result of drug addiction or negative lifestyle choices, what was important for officers in evaluating legitimate use was not necessarily *why* that individual had come to their current circumstance, but rather what their intentions were once they had arrived.

On the opposite pole was the “illegitimate” user, who officers perceived as uncommitted to recovery and unwilling to enter rehabilitation facilities. Interestingly, officers’ indifference for the precipitating cause of an individual’s relocation to Skid Row also worked in the reverse fashion. Even those persons with the most sympathetic reasons for appearing along the neighborhood’s streets – individuals with severe mental and physical disabilities, military veterans, women and children fleeing unstable domestic situations, and homeowners who lost their houses in the mortgage crisis – could be firmly located at this end of the spectrum. In fact, whereas in the past officers assumed all Skid Row inhabitants to be engaged in tolerable levels of “normal” deviance unless their actions proved otherwise, contemporary officers operated under

an inverted supposition, situating Skid Row users closer to the illegitimate end of the spectrum unless receiving indication otherwise. In this manner, structural constraints responsible for Skid Row inhabitants' current economic and social status overwhelmingly took a back seat to their current actions.

Occupying the extreme end of illegitimate users was a category of individuals that Skid Row officers referred to as "predators." Officers' concerns with predators was not necessarily new. In fact, much of the preventive protection function documented in the previous era of policing was aimed toward preventing such individuals from too readily preying on "normal" deviants as well as those less capable of self-defense. As policing took on a therapeutic quality in the recovery neighborhood, however, predators have come to pose an additional and overriding threat. Not only did these individuals attempt to exploit the depressed conditions of Skid Row for their own gain, but by co-opting the defiant attitudes of illegitimate users in a number of ways – including providing them narcotics and enlisting individuals as "hooks"<sup>38</sup> and look-outs during drug transactions – predators actively undermined effective rehabilitation. They also robbed, raped, and physically abused legitimate users in ways that greatly interfered with their ability to trust others, a characteristic that officers advanced as vital to the effectiveness of recovery programs.

Interestingly, predators shared this position on the spectrum with the neighborhood's most vulnerable victims. Centered on recovery management, contemporary patrol practices further departed from those documented in the previous era in that they targeted potential prey equally, and at times to an even greater degree, than they did those who attempted to exploit or harm them. This was readily apparent in the gendered quality of impromptu detainments and

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<sup>38</sup> A "hook" is an individual that serves as a liaison between drug buyers and sellers, a service often performed for a small percentage of the sales profit or a small cut of the product.

interrogations. It appeared as though officers' gendered assumptions about victimization and rehabilitation at times led to an elevated frequency and intensified character of officer contact with female inhabitants. First, as illustrated earlier, officers perceived women, especially disabled women, as far easier prey because they were less capable of physically defending themselves against aggressive men. Second, officers perceived women as more amenable to recovery and less likely to abscond from rehabilitation facilities. While not often explicitly articulated, there certainly were times in which officers openly reflected on this assumption. As one Central Division sergeant informed me, "Women are much easier. They aren't steeped in that tough guy, macho, gangbanger mentality. They don't want to fight everybody. So once they start getting help, it sticks a lot faster. We won't see them back out on the streets in a day or two like we see with a lot of the guys." Observing these interactions, I quickly recognized that the threshold for making contact with women was often far lower than that existing for men. It was not uncommon for officers to detain and handcuff a woman in order to inquire as to whether she was "safe." Privileging women as special targets of coercive patrol practices fits well within an ideal economy of intervention that aims to expend the department's finite level of resources to manipulate the neighborhood conditions in a way that propels the greatest number of individuals along a desired trajectory of recovery.



Figure 17. Detaining, handcuffing, and interrogating a woman to inquire about her safety.

As officers defined Skid Row as an instrumental and *transitional* space, legitimate use took on an important temporal quality. The longer an individual remained in the area, the further they moved along the spectrum in the direction of illegitimate use. Officers tended to view an individual's extended stay in Skid Row as a clear sign that they were unwilling to fully embark on rehabilitation. As one officer instructed me after a community-impact meeting, "With the concentration of services for people down here, we've come to learn that the people who really want to get better do so quite quickly. They take full advantage of the services and they're up and out. What this means is that the vast majority of people that remain here are here because they choose to be." Officers further advanced that the longer that they allowed an individual to remain in the area, especially in the Bottom, the higher the probability that their lifestyle – most notably addiction and the propensity toward related crimes – would be further cemented, making attempts at rehabilitation increasingly more difficult. Long-term presence was seen as



additionally problematic because it was perceived to undermine the rehabilitative attempts of *other* inhabitants, forming a more general threat to the proper functioning of the neighborhood.

As with the spatial lens through which officers perceived the neighborhood and its population, the presence of the mega-shelters rested at the center of temporal concerns. Officers advanced that because of the concentration of social services, it was practically impossible for an individual to get through a single day, let alone a week or month, *without* being presented with at least one opportunity to begin rehabilitation. Nearly all of the area's social services require clients to demonstrate some commitment to self-improvement – whether it be through prayer service, manual labor, drug counseling, or employment training – in order to receive food, clothing, or daily living accommodations. In fact, this arrangement is a common characteristic of those facilities that have been the most vocal supporters of, and collaborators with, the Safer Cities Initiative. As a result, I frequently heard the argument that those who had made Skid Row their home for months or years must have been confronted with thousands of opportunities to solve their problems and leave the area. Thus, those continuing to inhabit Skid Row were overwhelmingly viewed as having willfully and intentionally declined those opportunities.

Taken together, policing practices in the contemporary context rested on a radically revised construction of the Skid Row population. Recall that in the previous era, officers patrolling the rabble zone tended to view and interact with those found in the neighborhood as an incorrigible mass, void of cognitive power and decision-making skills. Officers operated within what Garland (1996: 461) termed a “criminology of the other,” which constructs criminals, and in this case, addicts, as alien social groups with little resemblance to “us”. As a recovery neighborhood, however, officers operated according to a “criminology of the self,” that explains problematic behavior in reference to standard motivational patterns. While there certainly

remained a small portion of the population that resembled the Skid Row of old, the vast majority of the modern day Skid Row population was constructed as a collection of rational, entrepreneurial, and opportunistic actors constantly engaged in a cost benefit analysis, weighing up the risks and potential gains before engaging in drug-related behaviors. This overwhelmingly came at the expense of any conception of addiction and drug use rooted in biochemical etiology. Accordingly, officers' role became that of facilitator and educator toward good choices. Well-educated inhabitants were expected to quickly engage in self-surveillance and make the right choice, while those who did not were recast as blameworthy agents, subject to even more repressive and punitive measures at officers' ready disposal.

I must note that officers did occasionally acknowledge the presence of a small portion of severely mentally disabled individuals residing in the neighborhood that they advanced as cognitively incapable of opting into rehabilitation opportunities. Whereas intensive patrol practices were framed as altering the incentive structure for able-minded individuals, these same practices served to usher mentally ill individuals "into the system." As the SCI lieutenant told me as we sat in the conference room, "Are there a group out there that is mentally incapable of making the right choices? Sure. Those folks aren't necessarily out here because they want to be. What we can do is book them, and bring them into the station where we can finally get them into the system so they can get the help they desperately need. If we didn't do that, there is a large likelihood they could die out here on the streets. It's a really unfortunate situation."

In this manner, even the most outwardly-punitive of patrol practices and law enforcement interventions were imbued with therapeutic qualities. Nowhere was this more evident than in the concerted efforts by Central Division leadership and the Los Angeles City Attorney's office to dramatically increase the penalties and likelihood of apprehension for involvement in drug

activity. With the launch of SCI in 2006, the twenty five additional narcotics officers assigned to Skid Row were immediately charged with carrying out “buy/bust” sting operations, in which plainclothes officers approach neighborhood inhabitants and ask them for their assistance in obtaining illegal drugs. In return, the officers promise these individuals a portion of the drugs or profit as compensation. Officers make these deals even more attractive by offering an in-kind or monetary return that is well over, and sometimes double, those of typical transactions.

In his evaluation of the first year of SCI, UCLA Law professor Gary Blasi (2007) provided several detailed accounts of buy/bust arrests, paying special attention to the manner in which the process served to reclassify drug *users* as drug *dealers*, thereby dramatically increasing the resulting criminal penalties. The following excerpt, taken from his report, documents the arrest of “Mr. Y,” a homeless and crack-addicted African-American male:

Mr. Y...was approached on a Skid Row street corner by an undercover police officer who offered him \$20 for two rocks of cocaine. Mr. Y told the supposed drug buyer that he didn't have any drugs, but that for \$20 he could probably get some if the supposed buyer would share either the money or the drugs. Mr. Y then went to another homeless addict and obtained 2 rocks of crack cocaine weighing less than one fifth of a gram in total. When he took these drugs to the undercover officer and passed the \$20 to his friend, he was arrested for the sale of narcotics.

Blasi's (2007) report found that at the moment in which plainclothes officers approached users, they may not have actually been in possession of narcotics. However, upon solicitation, and what Blasi (2007: 35) referred to as an “offer they can't refuse,” suspects acquired the contraband and

engaged in the sale. The prevalence of the stings is evidenced by the arrest statistics collected in the first year of SCI. Of the approximately 750 SCI arrests made per month, over 55% (416) were for drug-related offenses. Buy/bust stings were largely responsible for the fact that nearly 47% (195) of such arrests were for narcotics sales or possession for sales (Blasi 2007). This means that under SCI policing practices, Skid Row officers arrested as many people *selling* narcotics as they arrested people for *using* them in Skid Row.

As part of this effort, the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office implemented several key sentencing reforms. Beginning in October 2006, only weeks after the launch of SCI, the District Attorney's office systematically increased the penalties associated with pleas bargains for those arrested on drug offenses in Skid Row, creating an environment in which significantly more cases were sent to trial. As a result, many of the cases that previously resulted in a plea, a charge of simple possession, and diversion to a drug program under California Proposition 36 now command prison sentences (Blasi 2007).<sup>39</sup> Mr. Y, for example, was sentenced to three years in state prison for being the middleman in the sale of 0.0067 ounces of cocaine.

Contemporary officers stressed a therapeutic influence of the buy/bust stings. Increasing the penalty for a drug offense was seen as paramount to changing Skid Row inhabitants' lifestyle choices. In a particularly contentious community meeting held in the Central Division police station, in which the buy/bust tactics were criticized by several representatives from community organizations, a patrol captain drew a direct link between increased penalties, self-regulation, and rehabilitation. He argued that the buy/bust sting operations operated well beyond their superficial purpose of providing an opportunity to take criminals off the street. He asserted that

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<sup>39</sup> Proposition 36 was enacted in 2000 – carrying 65% of LA County voters – mandating that non-violent drug possession offenders receive probation with the condition that they complete an appropriate drug treatment program. Under Proposition 36, the court may also impose as a condition of probation participation in vocational training, family counseling, literacy training and/or community service.

the tactic also targeted those inhabitants who witnessed or heard about the arrests, as the prevalence of buy/bust stings work to, in his words, “show the community what is right or wrong.” “It’s like going through one of these drug programs we have here, kind of like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. One of the important things they teach you in those programs that you have to get away from your old party friends because they’re a big part of the bad influence holding you down. That’s *really* what we’re doing. When you see your buddies all over the place getting popped over and over again, what are you going to do? Eventually you’re going to get the message that it’s in your interest to get as far away from these guys as possible. Right? You’re going to probably find new friends who aren’t such losers.”

An SLO chimed in to echo the captain’s assertion. “You have to remember that we’re actually helping people out here. Before we started this, these liberal judges up the street would just give these guys a slap on the wrist and send them to some minor Proposition 36 treatment facility. And what did that do? It let the people down here know that they could keep on messing around with their lives. Listen, when we arrest these guys we’re trying to put them away for a while so they can think about what they’re doing. So now, when they get out, they’re clean and they can stay clean longer. All the time I get guys coming up to me and saying ‘Thank you for straightening me out.’ They’re adults. They’ve got to start taking their lives seriously.”

I found it curious that officers would express such disdain for Proposition 36, a legislative measure that linked addicts with ostensibly the same rehabilitative opportunities toward which police measures were directed. The answer to this seeming contradiction rested in the belief, indicated in the SLO’s assertions, that without a highly-visible punitive component, Proposition 36 did not adequately address the incentive structure guiding behavior; it was inadequate in communicating the negative implications of drug activity to arrestees as well as to

those witnessing or hearing about these arrests. Without an adequately harsh “stick” to recovery program’s “carrot,” officers advanced, rehabilitation opportunities were not taken seriously enough to be truly effective.

## **Conclusion**

Moving from the historical to the ethnographic level, this chapter has been able to address two significant gaps in the current literature on the proliferation of aggressive broken windows policing in impoverished urban neighborhoods. First, orienting analysis around an ethnographic revisit of Bittner’s (1967) classic study of Skid Row policing, I have been able to explicitly consider what exactly is “new” about this new policing paradigm. Second, in moving from an examination based primarily on policies and principles to police *practices*, I have empirically considered what Skid Row officers in the contemporary context are actually doing *on the ground*. How officers perceive of the neighborhood and their role in that space matters greatly for how they determine what situations, individuals, and behaviors constitute a “broken window” in need of intervention, as well as what “fixing” broken windows actually entails.

Comparing the policing documented by Bittner (1967) with what I observed during my fieldwork, I found that officers hold radically different perceptions of the neighborhood and of their own role there. Whereas Skid Row was once patrolled as a rabble zone, contemporary officers patrolled Skid Row as a recovery zone. Armed with this revised conception of Skid Row, officers “read” the social and physical landscape of the neighborhood through a lens of recovery. “Disorder” came to mean quite literally any and all activities that might become a threat to the larger goal of cementing Skid Row as a therapeutic milieu. I showed that as a result,

the previous function of containment and preventive protection was overshadowed by a more transformative function in which officers utilized the laws available to them to normalize and reform Skid Row inhabitants. Shifting from their traditional role of rabble managers to their contemporary role as recovery managers, Skid Row officers no longer directed a majority of their sanctions toward those individuals who they believe to be the most probable to threaten “normal” levels of deviance. Instead, officers’ revised ideal economy of intervention dictated that they direct sanctions in ways that would best promote rehabilitation at the aggregate level, creating a neighborhood ecology capable of funneling individuals into social service facilities.

Amidst recent shifts in crime control strategies – ranging from the proliferation of aggressive broken windows policies to increasing incarceration rates and the construction of supermax prisons – scholars have questioned the fate of offender rehabilitation as a primary goal of crime control and punishment. One predominant argument, advanced in the work of Malcolm Feeley and Jonathan Simon (1992), posits that since the mid-twentieth century, crime control strategies have shifted away from a “disciplinary regime” – founded upon the diagnostic and clinical normalization of the individual offender – toward a “regulatory regime” that is more managerial in nature, devoting a majority of attention to the effects of crime – ensuring that they remain at tolerable rates and contained within acceptable boundaries – rather than the causes of crime (see also Simon 1993; Grattet 2011). Yet, using a locally-situated analysis detailing the “interactions between the punishers and the punished” (McNeill et al. 2009), my findings strongly suggest that Skid Row policing has progressed along a reverse trajectory. I demonstrated that while the former era of policing can be considered an ideal model of managerial control, recent patrols have been marked by an ascendance of a therapeutic ethos. In this, I showed that broken windows policing may actually allow for an *evolution*, and thereby a

re-legitimation of rehabilitation by virtue of its various compatibilities with, and usefulness for, projects of crime control. As is the case in Skid Row, strategies of normalization may have taken new forms as officers are armed with an increasing number of law enforcement tools. In this, both crime control and rehabilitation have become “responsibilized” (O’Malley 1992; Garland 1996), meaning that the responsibility for these tasks have been devolved from the state to non-state actors. In the Skid Row case, this includes the rehabilitative mega-shelter facilities as well as Skid Row’s inhabitants themselves, who are expected to control their own conduct by activating self-surveillance and self-regulation.

Guided by a revised vision of the prototypical neighborhood inhabitant, this chapter demonstrated how Skid Row patrols utilized the coercive power of the law to enforce and defend a single, approved notion of what “correct” rehabilitation entailed. In the next chapter, I consider alternate conceptions of addiction, recovery, and the neighborhood as held by Skid Row inhabitants themselves. As with each of the three chapters comprising Part II, I show that interactions between these alternative conceptions and the police techniques detailed thus far generate “spill over” effects that impact the physical health, economic viability, conceptions of self, and opportunities for community solidarity that are possible within neighborhood. I will demonstrate that at times, the contradictions that arise in these divergent ways of perceiving and experiencing Skid Row life significantly undermined the policing project and led to a range of social processes that have been either unanticipated or overlooked in much of the social scientific literature to date.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Building Sober Bodies:

#### Divergent Models of Recovery and Competing Spatial Practices

According to city planning documents, media accounts, police representatives, and neighborhood inhabitants, the two blocks of San Julian Street between Sixth and Seventh Streets constitute the “heart” of Skid Row. Anchoring what one senior officer referred to as the “institutional side” of the neighborhood, the two block radius contains Skid Row’s three “mega-shelters,” and has the largest concentration of social service providers and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Hotels that provide emergency, temporary, and subsidized housing. These are without doubt the two most congested blocks of the entire neighborhood, if not the entire city.

At its northernmost section, San Julian Street dead-ends into the Los Angeles Mission, the bright copper spire above its chapel casts a long shadow in the early part of the day. During public hours, the brick planters lining the mission’s courtyard serve as seating for between fifty and a hundred men waiting for food service to begin. Outside the mission’s tall gate, the street teems with activity. Rap music blares from a boom box. Traffic motors up the street in a cloud of exhaust, radios, and car horns. Individuals line the street, standing in small groups or propped in seated positions along the curbs and walls of nearby buildings. Most are African-American, though there is a small contingent of Latinos and whites. Directly across from the L.A. Mission is one of the neighborhood’s two “pocket-parks.” Inside, a small awning provides shade to several lively games of dominoes that draw significant onlookers. Several groups of women sit smoking cigarettes on the remaining benches, while the small patch of grass is covered with

twenty or so people sleeping in the sun. Out on the sidewalk are small groups of younger, more fashionably dressed men pacing from corner to corner, soliciting passersby: “Weed, weed, weed...”

Heading south on San Julian Street, the gutters are overrun with ragged-looking pigeons, splashing amongst large puddles containing a collection of Styrofoam food containers. Perched above, every two hundred feet, are surveillance cameras that feed directly into the Central Division police station a block away. Halfway between Fifth and Sixth is the rear, “social service” entrance to the Union Rescue Mission. Bodies stream in and out of the tall iron gate as shadows move past its windows overlooking the street from five stories above. Men in wheelchairs, pushing themselves around the bottleneck on the sidewalk, shake their fists at cars that weave between the flow of pedestrians that cross the narrow roadway. Passing a half-block of urine-stained walls and crossing over Sixth Street, the Midnight Mission comes fully into view, its bright white façade stretches the length of an entire block to the east. The mission dwarfs the two adjacent social service facilities – the Volunteers of America Drop-in Center and Lamp Community. Freshly washed, the sidewalk in front of the Midnight presents a stark contrast with the rest of the street, which is littered with piles of clothing, cardboard boxes, abandoned tents, and a mattress. A group clutching syringes huddles in the space between two buildings to shoot up. A line of fifty men has formed to wait for a bus that transports them to and from the New Image Emergency Shelter located six miles away in South Central Los Angeles.

Amidst this scene, at approximately 11:00am, up to four days per week, a group of eight to twelve African-American men cleared the debris from the sidewalk to make room to perform physical exercises using an admixture of dumbbells, barbells, and other pieces of homemade weightlifting equipment. More than merely a form of recreation, the men intentionally developed

this routine as an organic effort to construct a therapeutic milieu amidst the conditions on the street. In their attempts to utilize physical exercise in overcoming their long-standing drug addictions, however, these men's actions necessarily challenged the dominant model of recovery and corresponding spatial order authored by Skid Row's prominent mega-shelters and enforced by police officers.

As I detailed in the previous chapter, Skid Row officers utilized broken windows policing strategies – aggressively enforcing city ordinances prohibiting loitering, jaywalking, sitting on the sidewalks, and other minor infractions – to control inhabitants' movements through neighborhood spaces along a single and “appropriate” trajectory of rehabilitation. This form of “therapeutic policing” was meant to work because it provided an incentive for inhabitants to “use” Skid Row in ways expressly and exclusively directed toward self-admission into the mega-shelters. These interventions were simultaneously designed to provide a disincentive to engage in any other behaviors that might threaten or obstruct this goal, including congregating in groups, remaining idle on the sidewalk, or making Skid Row the site of long-term residence. As the Safer Cities Initiative's advocates and daily administrators reasoned, why would neighborhood inhabitants continue to engage in such acts provided the steeply elevated risk of citation, arrest, and incarceration that they carry?

As some of the numbers reported earlier in the dissertation illustrate, however, the Safer Cities Initiative, and the larger program of aggressive saturation policing that it represents, has been largely insufficient in convincing the population to significantly alter their daily behaviors in the desired direction. Inhabitants have proven unwilling to admit themselves into the mega-shelters' recovery programs. The marginal success rate of the Streets or Services (SOS) Program (discussed in Chapter One) is a case in point. Recall that SOS provides those arrested for

misdemeanor offenses with the option of enrolling in a 21-day residential rehabilitation program in place of serving jail time. Yet, only 17% of such arrestees select this option, and even far fewer complete the program. In the eight months following the launch of SCI in September 2008, of the 2,218 qualifying arrests made, only 34 individuals eventually “graduated” from recovery. The median length of stay was three days, with nearly one-third absconding after the first day (Blasi 2007). Despite these numbers, and casting the population in rather blanket terms as willful, self-destructive, and “shelter resistant” addicts, SCI’s advocates argued that with sustained police pressure, in time individuals would “learn” to see Skid Row in the correct light and alter their ways, ultimately achieving a “tipping point” whereby the neighborhood culture would shift.

Beginning with this chapter, I penetrate these statistics to investigate some of the local social processes that are at least partly responsible for SCI’s lacking results, as well as to uncover some of the unanticipated though consequential “spill over” effects this form of policing engenders. To do so, I consider Skid Row policing from the perspective of those who are its targets. In this chapter I present the social world created by the collection of men engaged in exercise-based recovery along the sidewalks of San Julian Street. I demonstrate that this group held an alternate conception of addiction and recovery, which gave rise to a range of what Henri Lefebvre (1991) termed “spatial practices,” that departed radically from those coercively maintained by Skid Row officers. For Lefebvre (1991), spatial practices refer to the seemingly-mundane activities of daily life by which individuals come to understand, experience, and contribute to the spaces they inhabit. This includes routes, networks, and patterns of interactions that are simultaneously being shaped by and shaping individuals’ perceptions of that space (Merrifield 1993). Through practices, inhabitants imbue the formal built environment with a

more personal, meaning-laden geography. As a result, inhabitants' spatial practices may have the effect of contradicting and challenging the dominant designations – what Lefebvre (1991) terms “abstract space” – put forth by planners, engineers, and authorities by interacting with urban spaces in ways that depart from “official” designs. In attempting to pin down a single, appropriate “use” of the neighborhood, police effort largely underestimated the role and durability of these practices.

This chapter begins by first describing the formation of the group, which was comprised entirely of parolees and probationers. Their trajectory into the area and their amassing along the sidewalk can be understood as an outgrowth of Skid Row's position in California's geography of addiction, poverty, and criminal justice. Next, I detail the group's development of an indigenous form of recovery that resonated deeply with their shared biographies. Drawing on common experiences of the prison exercise yard – more specifically their experiences at the prison “weight pile” – the men labored to recreate what they viewed as the redemptive aspects of incarceration. At the “Skid Row weight pile,” the group developed a new system of meanings and a set of practices that reconstituted their relationship with their bodies and with an immediate neighborhood environment that they perceived as antithetical to sobriety. I next explore how the weight pile, and the life-organizing principles engendered there, provided the men with a means of reclaiming a respectable and worthy self within a highly-stigmatized space. By developing strategies to physically and symbolically distance themselves from “typical” inhabitants, the group worked to demonstrate that despite being physically *in* Skid Row, they must not be considered *of* Skid Row. Lastly I turn attention to the men's direct interactions with the dominant recovery model and spatial order enforced by Skid Row policing. First, I describe how the men viewed, and ultimately opposed, the neighborhood's sanctioned rehabilitation programs as a

result of their simultaneous projects of sobriety and stigma management. Second, I discuss the eventual dissolution of the group at the hands of Skid Row policing to explore unanticipated consequences that resulted once the men were stripped of their primary source of sobriety and difference. Throughout the chapter, I am centrally concerned with how these men came to understand and experience Skid Row prior to, in juxtaposition with, and through police interventions.

### **Steel's Skid Row: Between Prison and "Home"**

This is the kind of dedication it takes to really get to where you need to be. The young guys are finally starting to understand when I tell them that. It ain't fun sometimes. Shit, life ain't fun. But that's what makes you stronger.

"Steel," an African-American man in his mid-fifties, was pushing a dingy red shopping cart along the sidewalk, recounting the words of advice that he provided an hour earlier to his crew. The assortment of weightlifting supplies was rattling heavily at the bottom of the cart as Steel maneuvered it over large cracks in the pavement that would snag its wheels, causing Steel to curse and give the cart a forceful shove. A thick layer of sweat ran from the space between his corn-row braids, down to his face, and disappeared into his long-sleeved FuBu denim shirt. The outlines of Steel's back and biceps were clearly visible despite the fact that the shirt was a size XXL. He was one of the largest men that I had seen in this neighborhood, or in any other neighborhood for that matter. Though he labored with the cart, the act seemed to fit the image of a rugged yet wise mentor that he worked hard to construct for himself. The route from San Julian

to his apartment on Seventh constituted two long blocks, but Steel had been making this trip for several months now, in which he committed the potholes and problematic patches of asphalt to memory, rendering the ten minute push as smooth as was possible.

Only two years earlier, Steel had been travelling a very different circuit, between his home in South Central L.A. near the Pueblo del Rio housing project – known locally as “the Pueblos” – and the California prison system. As a member of the Pueblo Bishop Bloods gang, Steel had entered the world of crack cocaine at a young age. Dealing quickly became his primary vocation, and as using became his primary form of recreation he developed a growing addiction. Beginning with an arrest at age 21, Steel had amassed a total of 17 years behind bars for a number of burglary, robbery, and assault charges. While he was never convicted of a drug charge, he relayed to me that all of the arrests throughout his life had been related in one way or another to his involvement in crack cocaine. As is the case with many other young men cycling through prison, the promise of cash in his pocket and cocaine on hand brought him back into contact with his former running buddies, and back into his old habits within hours of release.

“I came out a different man this last time,” Steel informed me as we sat in a park discussing his biography. “When I went in again in ‘02, I looked around and I just decided that I wasn’t going back to prison once I got out. I was just sick of being locked up. So I started changing shit up. It was my second strike and I knew if I came back in I wasn’t gonna get out.” He began concentrating his time at the “weight pile” – the collection of iron weights, benches, and other heavy equipment that are a staple in prison exercise yards. By the end of his seven year sentence in 2009, Steel had put on twenty-five pounds of muscle. Upon his release Steel headed south, though not back to his old neighborhood, but rather to Skid Row, which is located geographically (and as I demonstrate, symbolically) between Los Angeles’ Twin Towers

Correctional Facility and the Pueblos. On the suggestions of fellow inmates and prison staff, Steel secured a shelter bed at the Los Angeles Mission.

Steel was certainly not the first former felon to make this detour, nor would he be the last. The neighborhood has long been the most common point of prisoner re-entry in the southern California region. The service-rich environment provides the emergency shelter, food, clothing, and other resources many of those released from custody immediately require. As a result, the neighborhood contains roughly one-third of all parolees currently living in Los Angeles (Vaillancourt 2010). According to Central Division leadership, there are 975 active parolees with registered addresses within Skid Row's boundaries. Already a striking figure at 15% of the neighborhood population, this statistic nonetheless underestimates the percentage, as it does not take account of the additional parolees residing in the area with addresses registered outside of the area.

Yet while Skid Row may provide a logical destination for those exiting the system, it is home to a bevy of conditions that can exact their own psychological and emotional toll. "Of all the spots to land in, this is a wild one," Steel recounted one day as we sat on a park bench. "I had heard stories of Skid Row, but this place is mad crazier than the shit I was in in prison. It's like this is like the end of the road for most people. They just waste away. It's like putting a bunch of broken down people together in a big fucked up soup. But, I didn't want to go back to the old hood, so what am I gonna do, huh? Move to the valley or something? Buy a house and a little poodle? Come on man! I came out without a penny in my pocket. So you gotta find a way to keep your sanity in this mess. In the pen I got my head on straight by getting down with the cats at the weight pile. So I guess it was kinda automatic once I got out here."



Steel developed a daily routine of making his way to Gladys Park, on the corner of Gladys and Sixth Streets, every morning at 5:00am when the mission emptied its cots. Once the park opened, Steel devoted two or more hours to exercising, using the available pull-up bars, fences, and electrical boxes to construct various exercises, which he would supplement with calisthenics that he learned while in prison. The daily park routine provided an immediate “sanity,” but also allowed him to serendipitously reconnect with a former cellmate, Big Ron. “Once I saw Big Ron, I was like, ‘cool, it’s all good now,’ cause I was really just keeping to myself,” Steel retold the story. “I was still hitting my workouts, and that was cool, but I didn’t really talk to nobody all day, so I was kinda just on my own. I just didn’t want to deal with any of these fools’ bullshit.” Big Ron was a short but equally-wide African-American man in his forties who had been released a year prior. Since that time he had been renting a room in a residential hotel on the southernmost edge of Skid Row. After joining each other for morning workouts for several days, and hearing Steel complain about sleeping in the mission, Big Ron began letting Steel crash on his floor. As part of his efforts to avoid the kind of street-life that had landed him in prison half a lifetime earlier, Steel secured a part-time job with a moving company located near Big Ron’s hotel room, which he supplemented with a monthly General Relief check. Now with an income of just over \$1,000 a month, Steel was able to begin buying and preparing his own food, which allowed him to spend less time at the mission. “That was just about the last place I wanted to be sitting around at. It’s just depressing, and I’ve had enough of standing in a chow line.”

Steel and Big Ron continued their morning workouts. One day, just outside the gates of the park, a middle-aged Asian man parked his van and dropped a large collection of used clothing on the sidewalk. Amidst the swarm of people grabbing for various articles of clothing

the man had assembled, Big Ron noticed a grip strengthening device – a metal spring attached to two plastic handles. He approached the man and asked if he had any other pieces of equipment. The man informed him that his church was looking to give away several dumbbells and other miscellaneous weight lifting equipment. The next morning the man returned with the items as promised. Steel and Big Ron loaded the equipment into an empty shopping cart they located on an adjacent street and began a daily routine of hauling the weights to and from the park for their workouts. Within a week, however, a park maintenance employee, flanked by a park security guard, instructed the two that they would no longer be allowed to bring their collection of equipment into the park. Steel and Big Ron decided that they would alternate the location of their workout. While Steel was initially disappointed that access to the park had been curtailed, he received a renewed sense of purpose upon relocating.

“When me and Big Ron came up here, that was when we *really* started getting down. That was when we started picking up numbers, too. Young bucks started coming over and getting down with us.” Steel and Big Ron oversaw regular workouts roughly five times per week in the mid-mornings. Mondays, Wednesdays, and the occasional Friday and Saturday were spent lifting weights on San Julian Street, with Gladys Park serving as the location for “body weight circuits” in which dumbbells were wholly replaced by calisthenics and various styles of push-ups and pull-ups. “When I was locked up, the O.G.s that were in there on life sentences showed me how they got down.<sup>40</sup> So now it’s like I’m the O.G., you know what I’m saying? There’s other cats out here like me that just got out and looking around for an activity that’s gonna keep them

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<sup>40</sup> The acronym O.G. literally stands for “original gangster.” However, in its common usage, the title need not necessarily denote gang affiliation. In Skid Row, as in many other impoverished communities of color, O.G. is a deferential term used to refer to one’s elders or superiors. It operates much like the term “old head” as documented in the work of Anderson (1990, 1999) and Duneier (1999).

out of trouble, keep them alive in this bullshit. We're all trying to stay off that dope, off that pipe, away from that old shit that got us locked up. The iron is good medicine.”



Figure 18. “Body Weight” Exercises in Gladys Park.

Indeed, as I joined the group on a daily basis from July 2010 through March 2011, I came to understand how the men held their regular workouts as a unique and proactive remedy for drug abuse and its associated behaviors. With family and romantic partners estranged, living arrangements overturned, and financial resources exhausted on account of lengthy periods of incarceration, these men were literally starting over, building a new life from scratch. While Skid Row was intentionally designed to facilitate in that very process, providing an unmatched concentration of services, including free food, shelter, and opportunities for welfare payments and affordable and subsidized housing (see Chapter One), it has long been characterized by an unrivaled saturation of, and access to, inexpensive narcotics. Thus, for Steel and his crew,

workouts helped to better exploit the “positive” resources in the neighborhood without succumbing to its “negative” aspects. The men grounded this task within a set of bodily practices designed to generate a transformed and transcendent “sober self.”

### **Creating a Sober Self: “Getting Pumped”**

Whether along the sidewalks of San Julian Street or in Gladys Park, when the men came together, they organized around a central task, described succinctly by Steel as “getting a good pump on.” “The Pump” refers to the noticeable growth, and sometimes even doubling of muscle size that occurs while an individual is engaged in intense anaerobic exercise like weight lifting. Reverence and dogged pursuit of the Pump is not unique to Steel’s crew. In fact, this (at times seemingly mythological) physical transformation is among the topics discussed most intensely in gyms and locker rooms across the world.<sup>41</sup> For Steel’s crew, the Pump was an obsession. My fieldnotes are filled with repeated exchanges in which the Pump – and its verb-tense analogs including “blasting,” “crushing,” and “getting jacked” – continually arose as the primary, and sometimes *only* topic of conversation. I soon found that within the context of the Skid Row weight pile, however, the Pump was injected with additional and important symbolic significance, that served to (re)structure the men’s attitudes and behaviors.

Consider, for instance, the multiple ways in which mention of the Pump arose over the course of a single hour for a single individual, a group member named Dice. Dice, a fair-skinned

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<sup>41</sup> In the words of bodybuilding and fitness icon, Arnold Schwarzenegger: “The greatest feeling that you can get in the gym or the most satisfying feeling you can get in the gym is *the Pump*. Let’s say you train your biceps: blood is rushing into your muscles and that’s what we call ‘the Pump.’ Your muscles get a really tight feeling, like your skin in going to explode any minute. You know it’s really tight like somebody is blowing air into your muscles. It just blows up and it feels different, it feels fantastic. (pause) It’s as satisfying to me as *coming is*, you know, as having sex with a woman and coming” (Wacquant 1995: 176, emphasis original).

African-American in his late twenties, worked out with the crew roughly three times per week. Raised by a single mother in the nearby city of South Gate, Dice made contact with the criminal justice system early in life. At sixteen he spent a year in a juvenile detention center and one more on probation for breaking into a dozen houses with several of his friends. Living with various girlfriends throughout his early twenties, Dice was in and out of minimum security prisons for marijuana and crack cocaine possession charges. Following his most recent release he was unable to rekindle enough of a romance with any of his former partners to secure steady living arrangements. Without housing, Dice followed his escalating cocaine addiction to Skid Row where he alternated between sleeping in the courtyard of the Midnight Mission or on the streets. After four months in the neighborhood, Dice's name rose to the top of the waiting list for transitional housing, and he moved into a room in an SRO hotel overlooking Gladys Park. Spending the majority of his waking hours in and around the park, he gradually began "getting down" with the others.

Steel and Big Ron took on the role of mentors to Dice, providing a calming presence to his hyperactivity, frequently "dropping knowledge" by providing (usually) unsolicited advice. During one particular morning workout on San Julian, they watched as Dice completed a forceful set of shoulder presses, grunting loudly each time he raised the dumbbells over his head. Gasping as he completed a final repetition, he set the dumbbells at his feet and loudly clapped his hands together. "There we go," he let out with a heavy exhale.

"There it is. Nice work baby," Big Ron said, patting him on the back.

I too complimented Dice. "Damn man. Going hard today. Nice job." We exchanged "dap" – a local handshake.

“I’m trying. Not too fucking bad for a nigga who used to be a all-star crackhead, huh?”

Dice responded as the two of us backed away from the dumbbells to make room for Big Ron to attend to a set of his own. He seemed to want to add to his statement, so I asked him to elaborate. Dice expanded. “What I’m saying is that’s some good shit for a guy that used to spend his time hitting that pipe like some of these motherfuckers out here.” Pausing to catch his breath enough to continue speaking, he pointed to a group of three men who were standing in a huddled circle on the opposite corner of the street, passing a pipe between them. “I was bad there for a little bit, man. I wasn’t living no life. I was just living for my next hit. Once I got high then I was thinking about how I was gonna get high again. But shit, since I been getting down with Big Ron, I guess you can say I been living from pump to pump. I guess I replaced one addiction with another.”

He laughed and continued. “But it’s different. Before it was like I was on cruise control. Like a dream where you just float over yourself and can’t do nothing. On autopilot, doing stupid shit – being on the hunt, sparking up the pipe. There was two of me, and the real me was just along for the ride. It’s been different now. I’m still getting my head right, but when I’m out here putting in work, Big Ron is always talking about thinking about the muscle that you’re trying to hit, and just keep trying to control all your muscles. That’s a big difference, your body actually listening to what you want it to do. So yeah, it’s like an addiction, but I’m awake.”

Big Ron lowered the dumbbells and interjected, speaking to me about Dice, who was still at my side. “That’s right. That’s what I’m always telling this man. How you gonna get your mind right if your body ain’t right? It’s just like how your arms are gonna get a little bit of a pump even though you’re mostly working your chest. Your mind is gonna get a workout too. That’s your most powerful muscle. I look at somebody that’s got their body right and I can tell that they

got their mind right too. Human beings just know that shit by instinct. It's nature. You know that this is a man who has got his shit together.”

Thirty minutes later, the workout ended and the men began exchanging dap before leaving in various directions. I remained with Dice and Steel as the two reloaded the shopping cart full of equipment. As I said goodbye, I asked them what their plans were for the remainder of the day.

“Eh, not a whole lot that's exciting,” he replied. “I'm just gonna go ahead and drop this shit off, then get some chow and just relax. I've gotta go to work this afternoon.”

Dice relayed his own plans, though addressing Steel more than me. “Shit, I dunno. I'm feeling pretty good right now.” He bounced a little on his toes as he spoke. “My shoulders are all blown up, but I think I'm gonna head up to Gladys Park and really kill it on the pull-ups and dips.”

Steel paused after dropping a dumbbell into the cart, and shook his head, “Now, that's *exactly* what you're gonna do. You're gonna *kill* it. Listen, man, you're looking good. You got a good pump today. You did good work. You gotta let your body recover now. Shit, you only got one, so listen to what your body is telling you. If you go too hard today, you'll waste up all your energy and you won't be able to get a good pump going tomorrow. Your body will be pissed off at you. That's exactly what's wrong with most of these fools you see down here. Look around.” Steel pointed to two African American men sitting against the wall on the opposite side of the street. “Look at these two guys. You think they listened when their body said stop? Naw, they probably smoked up every last penny and now look at them. They better hope the wind don't pick up again, it'll pick 'em up and blow 'em away. People end up running themselves into the

ground. Why? Because they ain't listening to their bodies. They just want more more more, all the time."

Dice looked disappointed at hearing this. Before he had time to respond, however, Steel had finished loading the cart and began to push it up the street. He gave us an upward nod and called out. "Shit, it's your call what you wanna do today, but you know I'll be out here tomorrow getting mine."

Resigned, Dice accompanied me up the street as I began walking to my car, parked four blocks away. We headed into a small liquor store and made our way to a large cooler on the back wall. As I began to reach for a bottle of soda, Dice found the occasion to adopt the role of mentor and provide me with a lesson. "Naw man, here's what you really want. Get some of this milk." He lifted up two pints of nonfat. When I declined, he filled me in. "You gotta get some protein if you really wanna blow your muscles up. That's mostly what I drink all during the day. This is the best stuff. Shit, I used to drink beer all the time. Sometimes in the morning when I woke up! But now I only drink beer at night mostly. That's why you saw me walk right past it to come back here. Beer will thin out your blood. That's why you get drunk. But if your blood is thin, you won't pump for shit. So after I work out I come get some milk, then go get some food at the mission. Really try to pig out, you know what I'm saying. I usually head straight over. I don't stop to talk to none of these fools or nothing. They be calling out like, 'Yo Dice,' but I got my blinders on and I just keep on walking." We brought our drinks to the counter and I paid for both. After thanking me, Dice continued, "It feels good once you sit down in the chapel and relax. I might take a nap for a minute, then get up in the line for food."

There is much to unpack in the above exchanges, yet it was precisely through sequences of interactions such as these that I came to learn what the Pump, and the routinization of



Pumping, meant for the men who gathered at the weight pile, as well as the fundamental role it played in informing their conceptions of addiction and recovery. When the men referenced their former “dope fiending” days, they overwhelmingly spoke of addiction in terms of an alienated and antagonistic relationship existing between their body and their mind. In recounting his time as an “all-star crackhead,” for instance, Dice’s comments illustrate this internal battle. He asserts that every moment of his earlier life was characterized by a struggle between an “addicted self” – driven primarily by the desire to satisfy physical sensations – and his “real self” – a kind of moral conscience that, while knowing full well the perils of continued drug use, was largely silenced or ignored. Many of the men spoke of the physiological effects of the “chase” as holding them “hostage,” oscillating between the ecstasy of the last hit and the misery of the ensuing withdrawal symptoms. “When you’re high you feel like a million bucks,” James, a thickly-bearded, heavily-tattooed and homeless African-American told me once as we helped Steel push the shopping cart full of weights back to his apartment. “It’s all good, til that first time you get dopesick. That’s when it starts getting really ugly. First you start sweating. Then your head starts pounding. All of a sudden you feel like you’re gonna die, like your insides are fighting you. And the worst part is, there’s nothing you can do. Nothing. Except getting that next hit. You want it in you so bad, you’ll be shaking so much you’re burning your fingers off with your lighter. But you just don’t care. Then it’s the best feeling in the world, so you don’t even remember how shitty you felt two seconds ago. And then you do it all over again, you feel me? That’s why they call it *trapped* in addiction.”

The men held Pumping as a fundamentally therapeutic practice, and thus a prime engine of sobriety, due to its inherent capacity to prompt and maintain a renegotiation of the relationship between mind and body. The act of Pumping provided the men with a means of regaining a

command over their bodies, rupturing this cycle of powerlessness while instilling the tools necessary to better avoid becoming “trapped” again. This renegotiation was rooted in the repetitive, often monotonous physical techniques that characterized their exercises. Using a particular movement, along a particular range of motion, for a particular number of repetitions, the men not only honed their ability to isolate and intentionally manipulate a specific muscle – targeting a bicep through bicep curls, for example – but also their ability to isolate and manipulate a specific *segment* of that muscle – targeting the “long head” of the bicep, for instance, by adjusting the angle of one’s wrist. Employing this strategy of divide and conquer, the practice of Pumping served to train the men’s minds to control many of their minute and otherwise unconscious motor functions. As the most experienced participants, Steel and Big Ron devoted much of their energy throughout the duration of a session to instructing others on how to perfect this form of corporeal mastery. “Think about turning off your arms when you’re trying to hit your back,” Steel might call out loudly from the perimeter of the circle. Minutes later, “You gotta really concentrate on that top part of your shoulder. Try to think about that muscle really working.” And constantly, “Come on, man, listen to how you’re breathing. Don’t get distracted. Breathe out hard and really imagine your muscle growing.”

As indicated by Dice’s statements in the exchange recounted earlier, the renewed and exhilarating sense of agency and accomplishment produced by this newfound bodily control could itself become addictive. Like Dice, Dante, who initially began lifting weights in California’s Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, expressed how he too began “living from pump to pump,” every aspect of life becoming infiltrated by thoughts of the weight pile. “When I was serving time, it was the only thing that kept me going. It was kinda crazy because I started to see that I was doing stuff to my body that I didn’t think I could do. So I was really hyped up about it.

I would just sit there in my bed thinking about what muscles I was gonna work tomorrow. I'm at the commissary, I'm on the toilet, I'm thinking about hitting the iron. When we came in from the yard I'd be all jacked up, you know, feeling good, arms all huge. It was like a new kind of high that I was just craving all the time."

Yet, the warning Steel provides Dice – that Dice would inevitably “kill” his Pump through overexertion and overindulgence of these new physical sensations – helps to illustrate that the renegotiation of the body-mind relationship effected at the weight pile was more than simply a reversal of power. Rather than a complete subjugation of body by mind, the continued practice of Pumping relied upon, and reproduced a *solidarity* between the two. In order to achieve a quality Pump day in and day out – to enable one's muscles to, in Steel's words, “get a good Pump going *tomorrow*” – the men were required to enter into new kind of dialogue with their body, staying on the lookout for signs that it may have reached its daily physical limit, becoming aware of the behaviors that might cause it to revolt. This was most readily apparent in the conversations the men had regarding muscle soreness. On one occasion, Demetrius, one of the regular participants, showed up twenty minutes late to San Julian Street and informed the group that he would not be participating. When asked why, he slowly rotated his arm with a grimace, replying, “My body woke up mad at me today.” He went on to explain that he had felt dissatisfied after the previous day's arm workout, so he spent twenty minutes afterward performed dips between an electrical box and a fire hydrant outside of his SRO building. While the men in the group expected a minor amount of soreness, in fact they welcomed it as a sign that they had put in good work the day before, they took deliberate steps –most notably a weekly routine designed and painstakingly regimented by Steel and Big Ron – to ensure that soreness never constricted their ability to return to the weight pile.

This term, “killing it,” arose frequently during conversations between the men, taking on an important set of double meanings. On one hand, *during* a workout, it held a wholly positive connotation. As they exercised, the men encouraged each other to “punish” their bodies in an act of creative destruction, squeezing out one extra repetition or pushing past previous benchmarks to build stronger, better selves. On the other hand, the men used the term to refer to the conditions that existed *beyond* the weight pile, in the neighborhood more generally, that were detrimental to their sobriety. The tensions the men balanced between these two modes of “killing it” effected a powerful form of self-surveillance. As illustrated in Dice’s final actions, these tensions transformed even the most mundane and seemingly-harmless aspects of daily existence; a trip to the corner liquor store, a choice of beverages, a walk down the street, or an interaction with acquaintances became a potential source of danger for the men if they “truly” intended to continue their workouts.

### *Negotiating Sobriety beyond the Weight Pile*

While the men’s pursuit of the Pump most immediately propelled a revised relationship with their bodies, it also catalyzed a renegotiation of their relationship with the surrounding Skid Row environment, reorganizing their daily lives life beyond the group setting. When the men physically left the weight pile, they carried the Pump with them, not only in the form of enlarged muscles, but as an interpretive lens for “reading” the Skid Row landscapes. The Pump instilled the men with a form of what Elijah Anderson (1990: 231) terms “street wisdom.” It provided them with a “system for categorizing the denizens of the street and other public spaces,” that refocused their attention on “a host of signs, emblems, and symbols that others exhibit in

everyday life.” As something to be monitored, nourished, and protected, the Pump became a kind of “recovery compass,” serving as a guide by which the men navigated experiences and arbitrated between possible activities. It produced a new mode of organizing space and time *beyond* the confines of the weight pile, allowing the men to avoid “getting caught up” in situations that they associated with their former periods of addiction. Among these, “hanging out” and other idle forms of social gathering were reframed as particularly troublesome. Like Dice’s trip to the liquor store, the men kept the Pump at the forefront of their minds, “putting blinders on” and “keeping their heads down” to ensure that their movements through the neighborhood served their intended purposes.

Tyrell, a soft spoken, physical specimen of a man in his mid-thirties, exemplified how this schema manifested in everyday life. Upon his 2006 release from the California Men’s Colony Prison outside of San Luis Obispo, Tyrell used his “gate money” to purchase a bus ticket to Los Angeles. Arriving in the evening, he followed the suggestion of one of his cellmates and crossed Alameda Street into Skid Row. When I met Tyrell, he was living in an SRO hotel on Fifth Street subsidized by his General Relief payments. While our interactions on San Julian or in Gladys Park were characteristic of those that I had with the other men during the course of our workouts, I noticed that Tyrell’s willingness to interact with me seemed to wane when we ran into each other out in the neighborhood. While he smiled and remained friendly, Tyrell kept the greetings incredibly short. On two occasions, we concluded our brief interactions some twenty feet apart, with Tyrell walking backwards, never once stopping his brisk pace up the sidewalk. As an ethnographer aiming to maintain rapport and gain access to the intimate realms of these men’s lives, I found these interactions extremely frustrating, though incredibly curious. Finally, during one such occasion I decided to risk an unwanted intrusion and ran to catch up with Tyrell

as he walked past. I quickly discovered the reason for the brevity of our exchanges along the sidewalk.

“Sorry man, I’m just making sure I catch the 9:28 bus,” Tyrell called to me as I jogged to his side. “I gotta get to the grocery store.” As we walked together, Tyrell shared that he had timed the walk from his building to the bus stop, which took him exactly four and a half minutes. Much to my own surprise as a native to Los Angeles, where traffic congestion makes bus “schedules” comically-irrelevant, we arrived at the stop at the same time that the #18 bus pulled to the curb. Figuring that I had already come this far, I asked Tyrell if he would mind if I tagged along. Appearing a bit confused, he motioned for me to follow him onto the bus. “The way I see it, there ain’t no sense in just wasting my time standing out here on the corner,” he told me once we found a couple of seats. “If I really wanted to spend my damn time standing around shooting the shit with everybody, I’d catch the bus over on San Pedro.” I had not fully realized until he said this, but Tyrell had indeed walked to a bus stop that was not only further from his building than the San Pedro stop, but we were also retracing along the same route that we had just walked, heading back *toward* San Pedro Street. When the bus pulled to the corner to pick up passengers, Tyrell gave a simple nod toward the bus stop, a wordless signal for me to take a look out of the window. The sidewalk was packed with activity, a collection of disheveled bodies lay on pieces of cardboard while others assembled in a number of small groups engaged in conversation, smoking cigarettes or waiting to use the large green public toilet that stood tall on the corner. Tyrell continued, “It’s like this all day and night over here.” He pointed in the direction from which we had just come. “But right now, at this time of the mornings, up the street it’s still nice and quiet. I try to get all my errands done before noon, when everybody else is still in bed, sleeping last night off. Less bullshit to deal with, you know what I’m saying?”

Tyrell shared the other walking routes that he had similarly “stop-watched,” including the trip from his building to the San Pedro weight pile, to Gladys Park, to his off-the-books job at a moving company further west on Fifth Street, and to a half dozen other locations in Skid Row. “But most days I just stick in my little triangle,” he relayed, tracing the shape in the air on an imaginary map suspended in front of us. “I wake up, get my errands done, then I head up to get my pump on. Then I usually gotta go to work. After that you’ll see me heading straight home. It’s simple. I just stay on my little path. The way I see it, you got a few options. You can go looking for trouble, and that’s the way I used to roll back in the day, always getting into some shit just for fun. Or, you stand around too long bullshitting with the wrong people, and trouble is gonna come find *your* ass, whether you want it or not. I done paid the price for trouble already.” Tyrell laughed deeply, exposing the large gap that formerly held his four bottom teeth.

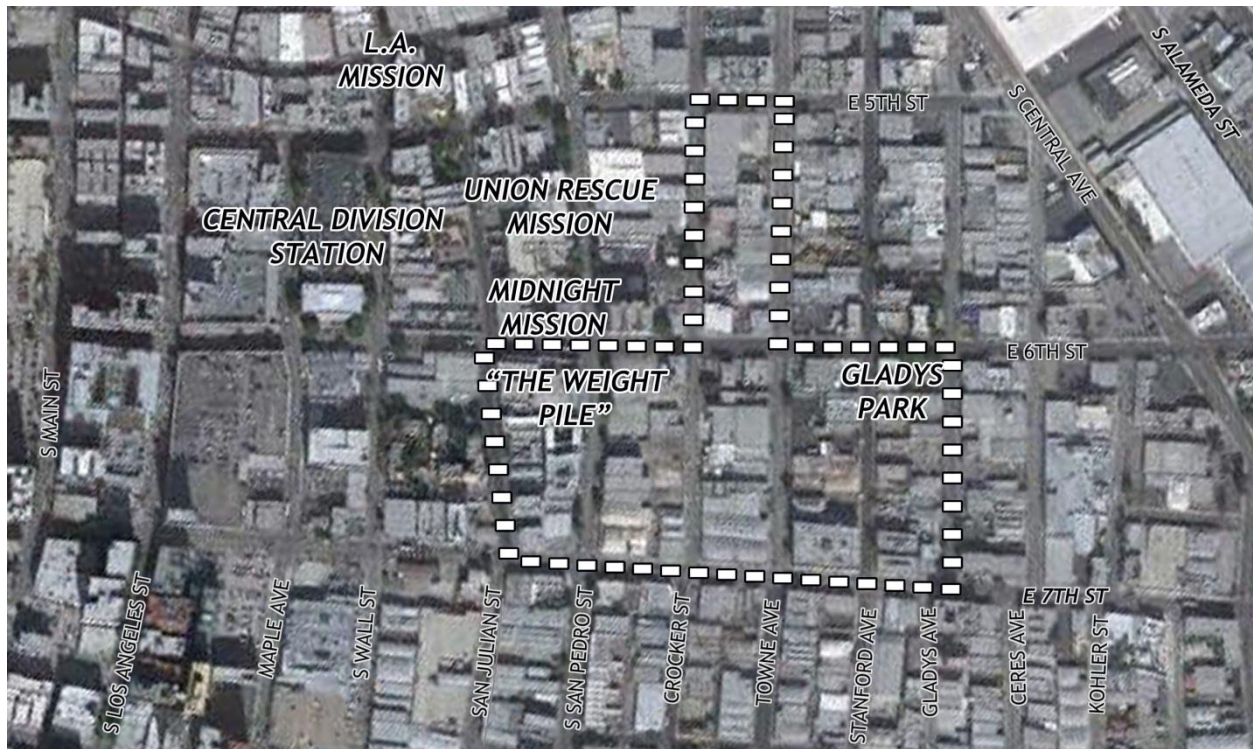


Figure 19. Tyrell’s “Triangle” (daily path carefully avoiding the crowds gathered on San Pedro Street and Fifth Street).

It took us fifteen minutes to reach our destination, a giant Food 4 Less store in MacArthur Park, a predominantly-Latino neighborhood west of downtown, where Tyrell used his EBT card to purchase cans of tuna fish and several packages of skirt steak. “Gotta feed your muscles,” he commented with a grin and a Steeling of his bicep as we approached the cashier, launching into a long lesson on the body’s protein intake requirements. When we finished, I helped Tyrell carry the groceries back onto the bus and back to his building. As we approached, he exchanged greetings with a group of men standing outside. While he met them with a smile, he once again never stopped his walk, and concluded the interaction calling “Peace out, fellas” over his shoulder. I asked if the other men lived in the building. “Yeah, of course,” he replied. “We’re all neighbors in these two buildings.” He paused for a moment. “I don’t really see them all that



much anymore though. I mean, I'll stop and kick it for a bit. But it's the same thing every day, just sitting around talking bullshit. I know how it goes with those guys. Somebody is gonna pull out a pipe, or a bottle of whiskey or something. You know me, I like having a good time, but I don't need to be running the streets all night. So I usually just say 'what's up,' maybe smoke a cigarette, and head up to my room, watch a DVD or something. I'm trying to wake up feeling good." He delivered a couple light punches to my stomach before heading into his building. "I gotta be sure that I can get out there and show you young fellas how to *really* get down. I gotta come correct if I'm gonna make sure you keep you working hard." He pointed in the direction of San Julian Street and the usual spot for the workouts. "And that way can't none of those fools say shit about slacking off!" We shook hands and said our goodbyes as Tyrell headed inside for the rest of the day.

Tyrell's "split" personality – communicative and welcoming at the weight pile, yet aloof and distance everywhere else – reflected a general orientation among the men. Besides Steel and Big Ron, who shared an apartment, the group members typically did not socialize with each other, or with other inhabitants, beyond the weight pile. Those who rented SRO rooms spent a considerable portion of their day inside and off the streets. Steel and Reggie, a younger group member with short dreadlocks, were notorious "nappers," heading directly home after workouts for their daily "siesta," occasionally returning the next day competing over which of them had slept the longest. Tyrell and Dante swapped and shared large stacks of pirated DVDs that they purchased from the "street entrepreneurs" that operated on Fifth Street (see Chapter Four). Viewing as many as four or five movies per day, it was not uncommon for me to hear the grunts of a taxing workout mixed with heated, amateur film analysis. For the men, the time spent napping or watching DVDs could by no means be considered idle behavior or lazy habits. Far

from it. Because the Pump *required* the men to devote time out of their day to recuperate from strenuous workouts, these periods were reframed as active moments in the recovery process. While they considered others engaged in what was ostensibly the same behavior as “wasting away,” Steel and his crew articulated that they were actually quite busy “building up.”

While the men were able to utilize their dedication to the Pump to carve sober selves from the neighborhood environment, their presence in Skid Row presented them with an additional dilemma: the dilemma of constructing respectable and worthy selves within a stigmatized territory associated with moral failure and social relegation.

### **Creating a Non-Skid Row Self: Renegotiating Space, Stigma, and Identity**

In addition to effecting sobriety, the collective activity at the weight pile provided the men with a means of managing the tension between internal self-perceptions and externally-imposed social identities conferred by their presence in Skid Row. Many of the men communicated that while Skid Row was a logical destination after their release, they nonetheless felt reluctant, disgusted, and even ashamed to take up residence within the neighborhood. This sentiment was far from unique. In fact, in their study of L.A. homelessness, Wolch and Dear (1993: 273) remarked that Skid Row was the one place in Los Angeles that their homeless respondents overwhelmingly attempted to avoid, stating that “for them, Skid Row is a kind of purgatory.”

Many of the men that frequented the weight pile, especially those who had grown up in nearby South Central L.A., relayed stories regarding their long-held assumptions about, and former contact with, the neighborhood and its inhabitants. Once, Big Ron laughed loudly to

himself as he recounted, “We only used to come near here if we really needed to offload a package [drugs] in a hurry. Me and my boys would just roll up and all the crackheads would bum-rush us, like a stampede. It was crazy to see. I remember a couple of my boys used to really like to fuck with them, throw shit at them, watch them tweak out and shit. These niggas were always wacked out and fiending, so we really could have sold them baby powder if we wanted to!” Another man, Demetrius, found it absurd that I willingly spent time in the neighborhood. He typically greeted me with a barrage of teasing jabs – “Have you gotten used to the smell of shit and piss yet?” “Your nose hairs dead yet?” “You found your wife down here yet?”

Facing these threats to self, the men developed practices intended to reframe their physical and social proximity to the neighborhood’s denigrated others. The weight pile provided them the resources to increase distance from those individuals that the men deemed, unlike themselves, as “truly” belonging in Skid Row. In this manner, the men partook in what Gotham (2003: 729) refers to as “using space,” which entails “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identity tied to place and to challenge alternative meanings, degradations, and stigmas.” For Steel’s crew, this primarily entailed the physical and symbolic appropriation of neighborhood space and the accentuation of *extra*-territorial markers of identity.

### *Appropriating Space*

In his well-known dramaturgical metaphor, Goffman (1959) conceptualizes social interaction and self-presentation as a series of performances by social “actors.” Efforts at impression management are tied to actors’ ability to define situations for those involved in and

observing interactions. The most immediate feature of these performances is that they involve a stage, or “setting.” As Goffman (1959: 22) articulates, “A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place.” Given the expectation of coherence between a performer’s setting, social status, and anticipated behaviors, Steel and his crew were faced with the task of impression management and the construction of a preferred identity within the setting of Skid Row – a publicly-regarded place of relegation, widely associated with social failure, moral breakdown, and deviance.

In order to construct a more supportive setting, the group physically and symbolically appropriated the sidewalk along San Julian Street and the courtyard of Gladys Park. Feldman and Stall (2004: 184) define the appropriation of space as “individuals’ and groups’ creation, choice, possession, modification, enhancement of, care for, and/or simply intentional use of space to make it one’s own.” It is as an interactive process, with a reciprocal, transformative effect on the environment as well as on those individuals and groups doing the appropriating. Reconstituting the prison weight pile in Skid Row, Steel and his crew momentarily carved out a “non-Skid Row” space *within* the neighborhood. This revised stage allowed for the men to behave, interact, and understand themselves in ways that they perceived as running counter to the dominant order of the street.

A number of scholars have presented accounts of other impoverished urban residents attempting to create “safe spaces” amidst of insecure, dangerous, and stigmatized milieu (see Merry 1981; Wright 1997; Gotham and Brumley 2002). Wacquant (2004: 26), for instance, documents that a boxing gym on the south side of Chicago functioned as “an island of stability and order,” buffering its members against the negative external pressures of the neighborhood.

Wacquant (2004) frequently overheard boxers articulating the opposition between the “gym” and the “street,” especially when these individuals recounted how this recreational space allowed them to more effectively avoid criminal behavior. Yet, there are key differences between Wacquant’s (2004) boxing gym and the Skid Row weight pile that distinguished and contribute to the social organization and practices characterizing the latter. The most immediate of such departures stemmed from the fact that the weight pile lacked the permanent physical properties – walls, locking doors, or clear entrances and exits – that would otherwise provide a durable and readily understood demarcation that “fortresses” individuals from the influences of the street. While there was certainly continuity in the physical location of the weight pile, this stability rested primarily in the fact that the men gathered in the same location frequently enough to become associated with a particular strip of sidewalk. Thus, while their “regular spot” was confirmed in a number of my conversations with other Skid Row inhabitants who did not participate in the exercises, the space ceased to exist *as a weight pile* at all those times in which the men were not physically present. These particular pieces of sidewalk held divergent meanings and were put to a diverse array of competing uses by a range of other Skid Row inhabitants, perhaps functioning as a toilet in one moment, or as a bed or an intravenous shooting gallery in another.

As a result, the conversion of the sidewalk into a weight pile necessitated certain behaviors to re-create it anew each day. The ritual process by which the men prepared the space for their usage unfolded *through* the measures by which the men prepared their bodies for the strenuous physical activity to come; a process that I regularly captured in my fieldnotes:

I arrived on San Julian shortly before noon. I scanned the various groups on the street in search of the other guys. Not seeing any of them, I leaned my back against a small brick wall in the shade of the nearby building to wait for others to arrive to begin the day's workout. Dante was the first to arrive. We exchanged a long handshake and he joined me on the wall, looking out at the rest of the activity on the street. "It's damn hot," I offered, noticing the sweat that was already building on his forehead. "Yeah, it's gonna get even hotter in a couple hours," he confirmed, "And look, it's still busy as hell. Lots of people out here today." We continued to complain about the summer heat for another five minutes. I was beginning to grow worried that the group would not work out today because of the heat. "Is Steel gonna be here today?" I asked. "Yeah," Dante replied, "he'll be around. No doubt. It's cool though cause we always need to warm up anyways. Gonna be a shitty workout if you don't."

Dante pushed his back off the wall and stepped out into the sun. He walked several feet out to the middle of the sidewalk. He stood for a moment with his hands on his hips. After a few moments, he stretched his arms wide to his side and began large arm circles. He began trunk twists, spinning his torso back and forth. At 6'3", Dante's wingspan nearly reached from my position on the wall to the street. Upon seeing this, several men carrying backpacks and shopping bags redirected their paths into the street to avoid being hit by Dante's heavy forearms. After five minutes, Dante had gathered a film of sweat which not began to collect around the collar of his grey shirt. He joined me on the wall again. "Fucking hot," he panted lightly as he stood. He looked out to the sidewalk, shaking his head as a group of three disheveled Latino men clung to each other as they

wobbled past us. “It’s too damn hot to be dealing with these motherfuckers out here today,” he sighed as he stepped back out to the sidewalk and began swinging his arms once more.

Tyrell was the next to arrive, giving me a “what’s up” head nod, and pausing on the sidewalk fifteen feet way from Dante to begin alternating between jumping jacks and toe touches. After several minutes, Rashaan arrived, exchanged handshakes with each of us, and walked into the street, three or so feet off the curb, and began a similar series of calisthenics. With Rashaan’s arrival, all sidewalk traffic was diverted into the middle of the street or to the opposite sidewalk altogether, as pedestrians began to avert the men’s violently swinging arms before they came within twenty feet.

Steel was the next to arrive, pushing his shopping cart down the middle of the street, its contents rattling loudly, echoing and amplifying the sound as it reflected off the tall concrete walls of the Midnight Mission above us. The cart came to an abrupt stop as he ran it into the curb in the middle of the empty space between the three men. “Here we go!” Tyrell called out with a smile. “Good shit. Keep getting your muscles ready to go to work,” Steel replied to the whole group as he started pulling the various weights and dumbbells out of the cart and meticulously assembling them in a long line along the sidewalk from Dante to Tyrell, taking care to gauge the distance between each. After doing so, Steel joined Rashaan in the street. With this, the men on the sidewalk took another step backward, enlarging the circle by another two to three feet on each side. After several more minutes, Steel began describing the workout plan for the day. “Aight,

time to put in work. We gonna hit biceps and shoulders. Tyrell, you gonna go first. Hit those curls and then those presses (pointing to several of the dumbbells). Rashaan, you can go next.” For the next half hour, the men rotated through the workout that had been described by Steel. Those who were not actively lifting weights remained in their original position, continuing their calisthenics or loudly counting out the number of repetitions performed by others. When someone finished a round of sets, they returned to the perimeter of their circle. Steel and Tyrell sometimes concluded their round by joining me in the shade for a moment, exchanging a minute or so of small talk – usually about the heat – and then replaced one of the others on the perimeter once their turn on the weights began.

Carried out each time the men gathered to exercise, this warm-up routine existed simultaneously as a bodily practice *and* a spatial practice. As illustrated above, various calisthenics and stretches were carried out for the purposes of improving the quality of one’s pending workout. The men utilized a strategic placement of their bodies, along with wide-ranging, sometimes violent movements to “warm-up” the space. In doing so, they marked off the territory, communicating its outmost boundaries and laying claim to a momentary “symbolic ownership” (Deener 2007), whereby they closed off the possibility of rival definitions and uses.<sup>42</sup> Although there was certainly adequate equipment for at least three, if not all of the men to exercise simultaneously, the group was diligent in maintaining the perimeter around their activity, quickly replacing one body with another. When upheld, this system proved effective in reducing the amount of trespass

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<sup>42</sup> While Deener (2007) has developed the concept of symbolic ownership to explain the appropriation of an entire neighborhood or street, it applies similarly on other scales, including the small patch of sidewalk claimed by Steel’s crew.



and interruption by outsiders. While not a daily occurrence, it was not unusual for pedestrians to disregard the human perimeter and venture into the recovery space. These moments prompted renewed concern for exerting symbolic ownership.

One such instance occurred as the men were nearing the end of their session, as Tyrell was grunting through a set of bicep curls. Suddenly, an elderly and incredibly intoxicated African-American man stumbled his way up the sidewalk and into the middle of the circle, and stood over a pair of dumbbells that were not in use. He went unnoticed for several moments. Tyrell faced the opposite direction while performing his exercise, and another man, BJ, had left his original position on the perimeter to join Marcus on the opposite side of the circle in conversation with a female friend, and Steel and I looked over a bodybuilding magazine that I had purchased earlier at a liquor store on my way into the neighborhood. As he bent over to pick up one of the dumbbells, the elderly man began to mumble incomprehensibly to himself. While his voice was low, the closeness of the sound drew the attention of each of us.

Glancing over his shoulder with a confused look, Tyrell announced loudly, “Oh man, are you fucking kidding me right now?” Putting down the dumbbells in his hands, he called out to the man who was attempting to lift the weights at his feet. “Yo old man! Can’t you see we’re doing work over here right now? Yo, man. Back off them weights.” The man gave no acknowledgement and Tyrell walked over to him, repeating himself, commanding the man to leave. The man responded with another muddled statement, the drool collecting on his lips as he spoke. Tyrell placed his hands on the man’s shoulders and began slowly pushing him several feet up the sidewalk, the man catching himself with each step in order to avoid falling. But, as Tyrell began to walk back toward the rest of us, the elderly man followed close behind, repeating his incomprehensible words. Without warning, Tyrell turned on his heels and gave the man a

forceful push, sending him toppling over into the street, where he remained lying on his back mumbling, as tears began to form in his eyes. Standing on the curb above him, Tyrell pointed his finger and scolded the man, “Open your fucking eyes.” Lifting his gaze to the groups of nearby pedestrians and onlookers, Tyrell yelled out a warning. “Ya’ll motherfuckers need to open your eyes and stay up out a nigga’s shit.”

Back at the weight pile, Steel reprimanded BJ for becoming distracted and not noticing that the man had encroached on their space. “You can’t be fucking around. We’re out here trying to get that iron. If you’re gonna get down with us then you gotta focus.” He then turned his attention to Tyrell, still looming over the elderly man. “Hey Tyrell, it’s cool. Come back over here and get that set of yours again. This asshole fucked it all up.” Tyrell returned and began his curls once more, and BJ returned to his original position, placing himself halfway between Tyrell and the man who was by then struggling to lift himself up off the asphalt.

For the roughly two hour period spanning the time from warm-ups to reloading the equipment back into Steel’s shopping cart, the men maintained a hegemonic grip on the quarter-block stretch of concrete. At times I found it excruciatingly difficult to stand by as the men exacted verbal and physical aggression on those who made the mistake of straying too close to their activity. I found myself confronted with a lingering puzzle. The group openly expressed disdain for others in the neighborhood traversing the sidewalk, and these individuals impeded the exercise routine; yet, I did not encounter a single instance in which Steel or one of the other participants communicated a desire to relocate the weight pile to a less congested, perhaps more private location. Why did the men adhere so strongly to this specific space?

After one particular workout that was interrupted on multiple occasions, spurring several group members to take vengeance on the interlopers, I decided to press Steel to account for the dedication to San Julian Street.

“Well, that’s the spot where we started at,” he replied matter-of-factly, shrugging off my question.

“Yeah,” I responded, trying not to make my dissatisfaction with his answer obvious. “But why stay there *now*?”

Steel nodded his head toward the cart and raised his eyebrows. “You really think I wanna be dragging this stuff all over the neighborhood? This is a workout just right here, just getting this thing down the street. Without wheels [a car] I ain’t going too far off the block. It’s cool though. I can do it, but shit, you want me drop dead or something?”

“No, no, man. Definitely not. I guess you’re right,” I replied, as we both chuckled.

“But check it,” he continued. Resigned to elaborate, he communicated that a major component of his rationale was rooted in far more than convenience. “Since me and Ron started putting the weights out over there, we’ve picked up the numbers. Now we got a core group of guys really wanting to get down every day. If we’re always moving around, it’s gonna be hard to keep it up. Right now we’re right in the middle of the action. Right in the middle for *everybody*.” Steel emphasized this last word as he swept his hands toward the nearby street scene. “It’s like with BJ. You know him, he was walking along and he saw us. He came by and hollered. The rest is history.” Indeed, BJ was one of the group’s early “recruits,” and a fellow former inmate who happened onto the weight pile only a short time before I discovered it. During a workout, Steel had noticed BJ slowly approaching and signaled him over. Released from county jail only an hour prior, BJ was wearing the thin, light blue paper suit provided to inmates whose clothing had

been destroyed at the time of their arrest. After a round of introductions, the group members directed BJ to the Midnight Mission to ask for donated clothes. Afterward, BJ returned to the group, who explained how and where he could acquire food, housing, and apply for public benefits.

“What would have happened if we took it somewhere else? BJ wouldn’t have seen us.” Steel insisted. “Shit, even you. You saw with your own eyes that we were getting down and you came over too. And then you saw with your own eyes what we were about. That’s like with most people, they can see we’re out here working hard. Of course, you’re always gonna have some crackhead or some loony tune that’s so fucked up and spaced out that they don’t even know where they at.” Smiling, Steel began to laugh as he shook his head. “But those fuckers wouldn’t know ‘til you dropped a damn weight on their head.”

The answer to my puzzle rested squarely in the fact that the group was utilizing the conditions and individuals surrounding the weight pile as “props” to support their performance of difference (Goffman 1959). They strove to become deviants within a deviant neighborhood. Thus, rather than retreat from street scene of San Julian Street, the group embraced the chaotic social life found there. For it was in this location that the men most persuasively highlighted their difference from the Skid Row population. It was here that they could most effectively perform their contention that they did not actually “belong” in Skid Row. As Steel indicated, this exceptionalism was readily apparent to even the most casual observer. He and several others routinely implicated my own fieldwork as proof of this claim. Often teasing me as I scribbled fieldnotes into my notebook, they found instances to remind me that I myself had quickly recognized the stark contrasts between the group and those nearby, leading me to deem the men worthy of extended academic investigation. They thus leveraged their unexpected, though

unwavering presence at this particular locale as what Goffman (1963: 44) termed a “disidentifier,” namely “a sign that tends – in fact or hope – to break up an otherwise coherent picture...in a positive direction desired by the actor.”

### *“Us” versus “Them”*

With the physical and symbolic boundaries of the group demarcated, the men worked to further accentuate the differences existing between those involved at the weight pile and those wasting away beyond its perimeter. This project took on both inwardly- and outwardly-focused strategies.

Focused inwardly, the men consistently emphasized the identity functions of their bodies, finding a multitude of occasions to compare their own muscularity with the bodies that characterized what they saw as the “typical” Skid Rower (on the identity functions of the body see Gill et al. 2005). A significant amount of the (seemingly) mundane interactions that occurred at the weight pile were characterized by a “competitive sociability” (Anderson 1976; Jerolmack 2009), in which the men compared and critiqued each other’s Pump. This “shit talking,” as they referred to it, closely resembled the “ball busting” examined by Jerolmack (2009) in his study of New York pigeon flyers. Such interactions presented the opportunity for the men to gauge their own status while building the solidarity that engenders a “we-feeling.” As Anderson (1976: 214) illustrated in his ethnography of street corner men, claims of identity “depend on one’s ability to manage his image by drawing distinctions between himself and others he does not want to be associated with.” Importantly, “by pointing to certain people as scapegoats who can be charged with rule infraction, certain group members are able to distinguish themselves both in their own

judgments and in the judgment of peers.” The use of contrasts is thus critical in the formation of primary groups that serve to affirm self-worth through social interaction.

Consider an illustrative incident of shit talking that unfolded during a session on San Julian Street. Dante stood in the middle of the circle that had been formed along the sidewalk. As Dante finished a final repetition of arm curls and bent to put them down at his feet, another participant, Rashaan, called out from his place at the wall next to me. “What happened Dante, you looking like you’re having a rough time. You falling off or what?”

“Oh shit,” Tyrell chimed in from the side with a wide smile, “Yeah, man. Where you been at?” Indeed, I too realized that it had been over a week since the last time I saw Dante working out with the group.

“I’m saying,” Rashaan continued, taking a few steps toward Dante, “I ain’t never seen you straining like that, making that face like you’re sucking on that glass dick [crack pipe]!”

Still remaining standing in the same location on the sidewalk, Dante kept a half smile on his face, slowly nodding his head as if calmly waiting for Rashaan to finish his comment. “Oh, you’re over here saying that I fell off, huh?” With the same calmness, Dante pulled the sleeve of his shirt up to his shoulder and raised his arm to steel his bicep. “Take a look at this. Does this look like a nigga that’s been out on the chase [looking for drugs]? Does this look like *falling off* to you? You see niggas around looking like this? You wish you had a pump like me. Let’s see what *your* ass is hiding.” He pointed at Rashaan’s left arm. Taking this cue, Rashaan similarly lifted his sleeve and steeled his bicep, which was noticeably smaller than the size of Dante’s arm. The two stood mirroring each other, staring into each other’s eyes as the rest of us added an assortment of comments.

“He’s got you!” Tyrell shouted at Rashaan.

“That’s how you do it,” added Marcus.

After several seconds, Dante snickered and informed Rashaan, “Shit nigga, you need to look at your own damn arms before you start talking all that mess. If anybody’s falling off, it’s you. You’re gonna have to work harder if you ever want a pump on like this.” He Steeled his bicep harder with a grimace.

“Okay, okay. You alright. You alright. Keep getting that work in, boy.” Rashaan walked forward and the two men embraced in a handshake and a hug. Amidst laughter from the rest of the group, Dante picked up the weights and began his next set of bicep curls. Rashaan smiled as he shrugged his shoulder and returned to his place along the wall.

Shit talk overwhelmingly concluded in a rather predictable and formulaic manner. After a short back-and-forth, the men called attention to a set of embodied evidence capable of proving that they had neither “fallen off” nor had they been “on the chase” while away from the pile. This response was rooted in the constant comparisons the men drew between their own physical attributes – a “pumped up” bicep or prominent veins, for example – and the emaciation, collapsed veins, and abscessed flesh that characterized the appearance of the drug users in the neighborhood. I was particularly struck during these instances by the efforts the men devoted to ensuring that shit talk remained beneficial for rewarding those who continued to conform to group standards while preventing committed participants from inadvertently falling out of community. This was further suggested by the timing of shit talk, which did not typically arise until at least twenty or so minutes into any workout. The men seemed to be providing each other with the time necessary to prepare their bodies to adequately respond during the verbal contests to come.



Figure 20. Showing Off a “Good Pump.”

This protection was not extended to those men that had fallen out of the group but remained in the neighborhood. In the first few weeks of spending time with Steel’s crew, the men occasionally spoke out a man they referred to as Willie. Throughout my five years in the neighborhood, I never did met Willie, but I managed to piece together a biography from various conversations at the weight pile. “Be careful,” someone from the group might warn others at the end of a workout, “you’ll end up like Willie, all shriveled up.” Willie had been a regular participant at the weight pile and several of the men considered him a close friend. However, without warning, Willie abruptly stopped appearing for workouts. Once or twice a week, someone might report a “Willie sighting.” They relayed that Willie looked significantly “hollowed out,” indicating that he had wholly lost his (ability to) Pump. Once his loss of muscle was confirmed by several others during one particular morning workout, the men began to integrate additional, emasculating comments about Willie, stating that he had “turned into a little



bitch.” Now, without the protection provided by the weight pile, Willie’s physical presence in Skid Row was taken on face value.

Outwardly-focused strategies not only acknowledged and called attention to the prevailing stereotypes of Skid Row and its inhabitants, but also manifested and reproduced these negative images. While they engaged in concerted efforts to insulate their activity from the surrounding social life, the men routinely breached the physical divide in a way that *exacerbated* the very social and bodily disintegration that they so fervently decried. Nowhere was this more evident than in the group’s *unprovoked* aggression toward others. Sometimes the group actively encouraged the drug-related violence and crime that rested at the heart of the neighborhood’s infamous reputation. When they came together, the group members seemed to derive a significant amount of satisfaction (if not pleasure) in watching the area’s addicts bring harm to each other and themselves. At times it was as if the men could carve out a modicum of self-worth and challenge denigration only by further degrading those existing beyond their human perimeter.

One of the most memorable of such events involved an altercation that erupted outside the gates of Gladys Park. A half hour into a workout, James and Tony noticed a frail and disheveled African-American man in a soiled and loose fitting t-shirt attempting to wrestle a glass crack pipe out of another man’s hands. “Oh hell yeah,” James called out, pointing to the two men, “It’s on now!” The entire group rushed to the gate, pressing their faces through the green vertical iron bars. Out on the sidewalk, the two men continued their light tussle in an effort to gain sole possession of the pipe. Suddenly, one of the men used his free hand to shove the other man in his chest, ripping the pipe from his grip. The group inside the fence erupted in a cheer. Several began to encourage retaliation: “Oh shit! You gonna let him punk you like that?”

Come on playboy, show this motherfucker who he's fucking with!" The man without the pipe paused for a split second, looking in our direction with blood-shot eyes. He seemed energized by the cheering, taking a couple awkward running steps toward the other man, delivering a punch that glanced off his cheek. "Hell yes, fuck him up. Show him who he's fucking with," I heard someone on the fence shout. The man with the pipe returned a punch, which landed squarely on the other's eye, sending him staggering to one knee. Tony continued to propel the fight by barking instructions with what could only be described as a giggle, "Go get him man, make him pay for trying to steal your shit. Show him what happens!" Meanwhile, Rashaan provided play-by-play commentary in his best "old-timey" boxing voice, "He's got him against the ropes, I see, but can he finish him off?" The man with the pipe continued his assault, striking the kneeling man with two quick punches to his nose. The blows sent the man to the ground clutching his bloody face. The encouragement continued from inside the park: "Don't stop now!" "Make sure this man knows you don't play like that." "Show him that's *your* motherfucking pipe!" Amidst a chorus of laughter, the man with the pipe responded by kicking the other in the stomach before quickly fleeing the scene. Retreating from the gate to their previous position at the foot of the pull-up bars, the men reenacted the incident. Tony and Demetrius giggled loudly as they pretended to punch each other in the face, falling to the ground.

Each of the practices involved in "using space" – from the dramatic warm-up routine to the pronounced sanctioning of intruders to the amplification of "stereotypical" Skid Row behaviors – served to increase the visibility of the group at the weight pile group as well as the population surrounding them. By strategically managing visibility, the men increased their opportunities to bring the dichotomy between "us" and "them" into even greater relief.

## **Divergent Geographies of Recovery**

Thus far, my account has focused on the weight pile's indigenous model of recovery and its resulting spatial practices as though they existed independent of policing. To more fully understand the Safer Cities Initiative's lacking results, it is necessary to examine how the spatial practices engendered at the weight pile interacted with the dominant model of recovery and appropriate "use" of the neighborhood as enforced by Skid Row officers. Recall that Skid Row policing is premised on altering the attractiveness of all those activities that obstruct or run counter to self-admission to the mega-shelters' residential recovery programs. Problematically, the success of this strategy rests on the assumption that inhabitants have granted, or at least in time will grant, the mega-shelters with a level of legitimacy sufficient to cause them to respond to police interventions in the desired ways. Yet, this is not always the case. In fact, the men at the weight pile viewed the mega-shelters as antithetical to their efforts to maintain sobriety and difference. As a result, interaction with officers had quite different results than those intended by policing policy.

### *"Pumping" versus "Working a Program"*

The men in Steel's crew tended to regard the mega-shelters as a necessary and at times unavoidable aspect of living in Skid Row. Many of them spent at least a few nights in the L.A. Mission, Midnight Mission, or Union Rescue Mission upon their release from jail or prison. Several men continued to attend meal services multiple times per day, particularly those who were homeless, as well as those who had been disqualified from receiving food stamps on

account of a previous drug conviction.<sup>43</sup> Even so, the men kept their contact with the facilities limited to brief excursions. While they often confirmed the mega-shelters' undeniable presence in daily neighborhood life, the men expressed an incredible disdain for, and refusal to participate in, the organizations' residential rehabilitation programs.

On one hand, the men's aversion is rather unsurprising. The programs' highly institutionalized structures closely mirror many of the conditions that characterized the men's long periods of incarceration. Several complained about the mandatory 8:00pm bed-times, "work detail," and prison-like supervision. In fact, Big Ron frequently referred to the program at the Midnight Mission as "6<sup>th</sup> Street Lock-down." Accompanying my research companions into food service and mandatory chapel service at the L.A. Mission, I experienced many of these contentions myself. For example, as part of their job requirements, staff members at the L.A. Mission would closely guard the rear of the procession into the cafeteria, making sure that the line could not be infiltrated by anyone who had not attended the hour-long religious sermon. As they stood watch, they continuously yelled, "Last man walking, last man walking!" in a call-and-response fashion that evoked images of an inmate's last march down death row.

Observing increasing interactions at the weight pile, I uncovered a less readily-apparent cause for disdain. I realized that the men's aversion was closely tied to the symbolic effects that enrolling in these programs threatened to have on their efforts hold onto both their sobriety and their non-Skid Row identities. Quite simply, maintenance of the Pump – a central organizing principle of the men's lives – was incompatible with the local recovery programs. This incongruence often arose in the interactions that occurred between the men at the weight pile and their counterparts enrolled in the nearby residential drug treatment and employment programs.

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<sup>43</sup> Under California law, individuals who have been convicted of a drug felony are ineligible to receive food stamps.

The regularity with which the men assembled on San Julian brought the two groups into repeated contact. Steel's crew assembled outside the Midnight Mission's side entrance that provided access to the facility's loading dock and underground parking garage. Throughout the mornings, two or three of the men "working a program" at the mission would emerge from the building to carry out their mandated chores – rinsing down the driveway, assorting trash, or directing the influx of delivery vans. At some point during the course of this, these men would occasionally say hello to Steel and his crew, and engage in several minutes of small talk. The conversations were typically cordial. However, once the men reentered the building, the tone at the weight pile shifted, and those remaining on the sidewalk would frequently spend several minutes conveying the negative opinions they held of those residing at the Midnight.

On one occasion, New York, an African-American man in his early thirties, stood shaking his head as he watched the mission door close. "I'm saying, this nigga comes out here every day with that shit-eating smile, all whistling and happy. But I don't know why this man's still smiling. He's in there taking orders from a bunch of pushy ass white fools, and he's taking that shit! I'm like dog, they're sending you off to take out the damn trash, then you gotta go wash the dishes, then you gotta cook up the food, and then you gotta do security. If it's me in there, I'm telling these assholes do all that shit their damn selves. Oh yeah, then they got this man out there in the front trying to break up fights and shit. And these fools ain't even paying him for shit? That's a house nigga right there."

Tony added his opinion. "I'd twist those little bitches up like a pretzel if they ever tried to push me around like that."

This contention arose two days later as the group assembled again in the same location. In the midst of their workout, the same two men from the previous interaction emerged from the

Midnight Mission, stretched a hose out of the doorway and began spraying down the adjacent sidewalk. While the stream of water did not reach within ten feet of Steel's crew, two homeless men who had been sitting on the sidewalk rushed to grab their belongings – an assortment of duffle bags that were resting against a nearby wall – that was in the direct path of the water.

Seeing this, New York called out to the two. “Yo, that’s how they got you doing it now?”

One of the men looked up from his activity. “What’s up?” he called out.

“I was asking you,” New York repeated, “Is this what those fools are getting you to do now? Fuck with other black people? What are you, their dog? Are you their mother fucking pit bull now?”

The men looked confused but responded. “Hey look, I’m just doing my job.”

“Oh that’s your job now? Doing these people’s dirty work?” New York’s voice was louder now.

“I’m just trying to get straight, alright.”

New York responded immediately. “You trying to get straight, huh? Well you can’t do it in there. Fuck them. Come out here, we’ll have you doing it like a real nigga.”

As New York said this, a white man, who appeared to be a supervisor, emerged from the doorway wearing an ID badge, khakis, and a polo shirt embroidered with the Midnight Mission logo. As he walked from the doorway, I noticed he had a concerned look on his face. He stood for a second looking at New York and the rest of the group. He then turned to the two men with the hose. “Let’s go guys,” I heard him say in a quiet voice, and the two men followed him inside.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought,” New York called out as they disappeared into the adding dock. “This man’s got you fucking whipped!”

For New York, Tony, and the others, those enrolled in mission programs may very well have been drug-free, which was certainly a commendable achievement. However, the group at the weight pile did not view those enrolled in programs as fully “recovered.” For them, mega-shelter clients continued to lack the corporeal mastery necessary to maintain sobriety once they completed their rehab and were forced to leave the structure of the facility for the addictive neighborhood environment. The control exercised over the body by drugs and alcohol had thus only been *replaced* with the control exercised by mission staff and caseworkers, as this new set of “masters” dictates every movement at every minute of the day.

This was brought home when James enrolled in, but quickly absconded from one such rehabilitation program. James had been sitting on a milk crate one evening, chatting with a group of fellow homeless men, when they were suddenly surrounded by four LAPD squad cars. Arrested for violating LAMC 41.18(d) – a prohibition against sitting, lying, or sleeping on the street – James and his companions were transported to the Central Division station. As part of the LAPD’s Streets or Services (SOS) program, James was given the option to either spend several days in jail or enter a residential program at the Union Rescue Mission. Along with the other men, James chose the latter. On the morning of the tenth day of his 21-day program, however, James walked out of the mission’s doors directly to the weight pile, and resigned not to return to the URM. I was largely unaware of James’ brief contact with this alternate philosophy until a week later, when the conversation at Gladys Park turned to the topic. I watched as James deflected the conversation away from himself, and decided to inquire about his experiences once the others had vacated the park.

“It wasn’t for me,” James replied when I asked why he left the program. He remained reserved but began to elaborate as I continued my prodding. “In those places, all they wanna do

is talk to you like you're some kind of retard, like you're a little kid. 'Go here, do this, check in at this time, lights out at this time, wake up at this time.' Then they wanna tell you what you're thinking, as if you don't know what's going on in your own head, right? Then you gotta stand up and tell your life story and say how you're an addict. That's where I would get the most pissed off. I'm not an addict. Straight up. I ain't smoked crack since I been down here. I decided I was done with that shit. So how am I gonna sit there and say I'm addicted if I ain't even smoking? It's a waste of my damn time. I shoulda just said 'fuck it' and taken the jail time. At least I woulda been out after like a day or two. Even the fools who do get straight in there, what do you think happens to them once they get done with the program? They go right back out on the same streets where they started using in the first place. Ain't shit changed on the outside. What are you going to do then? Your caseworker ain't there to hold your hand."

Marcus, who typically spent his nights on Winston Street, only feet away from both the L.A. Mission and the Union Rescue Mission, held a similar aversion. Having long-exhausted the time limits placed on emergency shelter beds, Marcus continued to sleep under a cardboard lean-to rather than enter a program, which would have instantly guaranteed him a nightly bed. "Those motherfuckers in there have given up," he told me one evening as I helped him gather cardboard from a storefront on Fourth Street to make his bed for the night. I had finally worked up the nerve to ask him why he did not want to move inside. "I'm not like them. I'm not trying to be friends with those fools, so why the hell would I want to bunk up with them, listen to their complaining and excuses all night long. I might crash for the night, but that's all I can handle."

Consider these men's contentions in light of the discourse of "shelter resistance" examined in Chapters One and Two. Steel and his crew aggressively resisted shelter. Yet, their resistance was not necessarily grounded in self-destructive choices and willful addiction – as



argued by Central Division officers and their mega-shelter partners – but rather in the belief that the structure and mandates of these programs actually served to *undermine* sobriety by constraining, and even counteracting, the forms of corporeal mastery, self-regulation, and daily routines that were fostered at the weight pile. Furthermore, self-admission to the programs threatened to erase the distance the men carved between themselves and those who they felt “belonged” in Skid Row.

### *The End of the Weight Pile*

Although Steel and his crew constructed stark differences between their daily activities and those they saw as typical of the neighborhood, this contrast was not necessarily perceived in the same manner by Skid Row officers. Though the group shared officers’ aversion to congregations of “idle” inhabitants, this could not compensate for the fact that, by convening regularly for multiple hours at a time, officers eventually came to regard the men much like (or perhaps even worse than) they did other individuals they encountered “stagnating” along the Skid Row sidewalks. In a somewhat ironic development, it was precisely the visibility and enlarged presence that the men worked so hard to create (and perhaps the manner in which their recovery paradigm manifested in confrontations with social service staff and clients) that led to Central Division officers’ eventual elimination of the weight pile space and dissolution of the group. Yet, as I witnessed, this intervention did not have the intended effect of compelling the men to initiate more “appropriate” behaviors.

On an expectedly warm day in March 2011, four uniformed officers – a captain, a sergeant, and two patrol officers – arrived on San Julian halfway through a workout session. The

officers stood watching the men from the opposite side of the street for several minutes before making their way toward Steel and the others.

The captain was the first to speak, addressing the group as a whole, “I heard about this, but I just wanted to see it with my own eyes. My sergeant told me you fellas would probably be out here today.” The men acknowledged his presence with silent head nods. The captain continued, “I wanted to come out here and tell you myself that this is really not a good place for this. You all ought to think about moving this out of here. Maybe somewhere that you’re not obstructing the sidewalk so much.”

Steel stepped forward to address the captain. “Aw come on, man. We ain’t out here causing trouble. We’re all just out here trying to stay in shape, you know? We ain’t hurting nobody. You can see that.”

The captain responded calmly. “I appreciate that, but look, I can’t have all this going on out here on my sidewalk. Like I said, you’re obstructing a whole lot of traffic. It’s a fire hazard and it’s stopping people from getting to where they need to go.” Steel began to speak again, but the captain quickly cut him off. “Listen, this isn’t really a debate, ok? It’s starting to look like the prison yard out here, and I just can’t have that. People are trying to get services and find housing, and it’s already hard, so this is the last thing we need to add to the mix of issues going on out here.”

“But...” Steel began.

Cutting him off again, the captain asked, “Are any of you on probation or parole?” Several of the men let out quiet complaints: “Aw come on, man!” Several others nodded, confirming the captain’s question. “Yes?” He continued in response, “Well, I’ll tell you what, when my officers come back around here today, tomorrow, and the next day, they had better not

tell me that you've been out here hanging around like this, alright? I don't want to have to come see you again." As the officers walked out of earshot, the men let out a collection of grumbles and curses.

Following the police intervention, the initial tone of anger and defiance eventually took on a far more resigned and defeated mood.

"Aw fuck them," Dante exclaimed, breaking one of the longer moments of silence. He turned to Steel. "It's like you said, we ain't hurting nobody. They can see that with their own eyes!"

Steel responded in a calm voice. "Naw, but you heard the man. He said 'It's starting to look like the prison yard out here.' I knew right when he said that that they're really not trying to fuck around. I'm not trying to test them, either. My P.O. [parole officer] is a straight asshole, and I know he's just looking for anything he can get to have me back in handcuffs. I ain't going out like that, G."

"But if we ain't breaking the law then they can't do shit," Dante argued.

"Yo, it don't even matter," Demetrius added. "I swear, maybe if I was on just regular old probation I wouldn't even sweat it. I'd be like, let these pigs try to arrest me. I think all my old probation officers woulda just laughed at that shit. But since I caught that paperwork for my pistol, I been on summary probation. It's all different." Demetrius had been on summary probation since 2008, when he was arrested for possession of an illegal handgun. Unlike formal probation, in which an individual reports to a probation officer, summary probationers report directly to a judge. The resulting unpredictability in the event of an additional probation violation worried him. "I don't know what the fuck the judge would do if I showed back up in court, even if it was on some stupid made up shit."

The meaning of the captain's parting words was clearly not lost on the men. His final, silencing question – "are any of you on probation or parole?" – must be read as entirely rhetorical. His earlier indication, that the area was "beginning to look like the prison yard," demonstrates that he was quite aware of the men's ongoing criminal justice entanglements. This thinly-veiled warning served to remind the men that any future sanctions, no matter how minor, carried the real possibility of placing these men in violation of the terms of their parole and probation. While their fears of future incarceration had originally propelled them to form the weight pile in the first place, these fears also worked to prevent them from disregarding the captain's orders.

"We'll see," Steel said in an assertive tone, pushing his cart away from the group and ending the discussion without announcing a future course of action.

As it turned out, this would be the last time that the men convened on San Julian Street, and the beginning of the end for the group. Thinking back on this period, given the resilience and determination that I had previously observed on the part of the men in protecting their collective activity from infiltration and attrition, I assumed that they would naturally reconvene again two days later, as dictated by their regular schedule. However, when I arrived at the usual location, it became apparent that the group would never again materialize in its previous form. While Steel was entirely absent, four of the men showed. Tyrell stood with me for fifteen minutes before returning to his building. James also arrived during this period. While he was not present for the captain's appearance, he indicated that he had nonetheless heard the news. Over the next hour, Reggie and Dante also came by, though neither stayed longer than five minutes. After an hour and a half, I too made my way off San Julian. The same process unfolded at Gladys Park, though over a longer period of time. I had expected that given their recent exile from San Julian Street,

the men would continue their regular calisthenics and “body weight” workouts, and perhaps even make the park their primary meeting place. This was not the case. I never encountered Steel at the park again. Several of the regulars maintained their schedule for at least two weeks. After that time, however, the number of participants began to incrementally dwindle. By the end of June 2011, if the men worked out in the park at all, they were doing so individually and at sporadic times.

Without stable housing arrangements, mailing addresses, and telephone numbers, it was difficult for me to remain in close contact with the group members without the regularity previously provided by the weight pile. I did run into several of the men over the next few months, however, but it was clear that they too had fallen out of contact with each other. I nearly tripped over James one morning in October, seven months after the initial interaction with police. After another arrest and another short stay at the Union Rescue Mission, James was now sleeping in a tent on Towne and Sixth Streets. James was a naturally large man, standing at 6’4” with a wide frame. Yet, in the tank-top he wore he appeared noticeably smaller than the last time I saw him in the park. I sat with him and we caught up. Within weeks after the weight pile had folded, he returned to spending time his former homeless encampment group, and began using both crack and heroin again.

“That was really rough on me,” he said, with a cast off look. “I dunno, I guess I just kinda figured, ‘Hell with it.’ It’s messed up that the cops can just come by and just order people around like that. We weren’t hurting nobody. Shit, you’d think they would want us to keep doing what we were doing. We were the only ones out there actually really trying to do right. What they need to do is take care of the *real* problems around here.”

I asked for news about the other men. He informed me that Tony had been arrested by undercover narcotics officers and that Rashaan had been picked up on a parole violation. I ran into Tyrell later that week during one of my regular walks along San Julian in the hopes of seeing the men resuming their workouts. He was standing outside of the Volunteers of America building, where he had been sleeping since a fight with manager of his former building led to his eviction. As one of Steel's closer friends, he relayed that the two had lost contact when Steel moved out of Skid Row and back to his old neighborhood near the Pueblos.

"I'll tell you what's *really* going on down here," Tyrell said, shaking his head. "The way they shut us down shows what the cops down here are really all about. They pretend like they care about people, but the truth is that they don't want none of us to really get our lives together. Shit, this way all they have to do is sit and wait til we all end up killing ourselves one way or another."

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has been oriented around a pressing question: why has the therapeutic policing model employed by Skid Row officers failed to produce the results intended by its architects? Why, despite aggressive enforcement, have Skid Row inhabitants overwhelmingly resisted officers' interventions designed to compel them to enroll in the mega-shelters' intensive rehabilitation programs? In beginning to formulate an answer to this question, I argue that these policing strategies have failed to take account of inhabitants' spatial practices, in particular the meaning-laden, geographies of recovery that inhabitants overlay on the neighborhood's built environment and social settings. While an account of the spatial practices of inhabitants may at

first seem far removed from the appropriate “use” of Skid Row that is coercively enforced by officers, the marginal results of Skid Row’s social control practices rests precisely in the divergence and distance that exists between officers’ and inhabitants’ conceptualizations of Skid Row, its spaces, and associated behaviors.

Having detailed officers’ orientations in the previous chapter, this chapter has reversed the perspective to present the group practices of self-reclamation developed at the Skid Row weight pile. Understanding the manner in which Steel’s crew and other inhabitants come to perceive of the neighborhood, its population, and themselves is critical to understanding the effects of policing, for it is with these perceptions that officers must contend. Indeed, officers necessarily intervene into thick and durable webs of meaning constructed by inhabitants as they attempt to negotiate neighborhood life, recovery, and self-image. While the group was ultimately dissolved at the hands of the police, I was struck by how similarly the group and officers viewed much of the Skid Row experience. With few resources at the time of their release from incarceration, the men approached their presence in the neighborhood in similarly instrumental terms. Perceiving Skid Row as a kind of liminal space – existing “in between” prison and their former neighborhoods and lifestyles – the men attempted to exploit the neighborhood’s saturation of social services and inexpensive accommodations. Yet, whereas officers utilized policing policy to fashion the neighborhood as an inherently therapeutic space, Steel and the others carried out their collective project of sobriety *in spite of* what they perceived as an inherently anti-therapeutic, addictive milieu. Building on shared, redemptive experiences at the prison weight pile, the men cultivated “the Pump” as an organizing principle for accomplishing this otherwise improbable goal.

At times, the ways in which officers and their targets perceived the same objective behavior – congregating in groups along the sidewalk or “idling” for long stretches of the day, for example – departed in consequential ways. As a result, prohibitions on these behaviors were not always interpreted by inhabitants in the anticipated manner. This was particularly evident in the differential ways in which officers and inhabitants defined recovery – particularly the antagonisms felt between formal, shelter-based models and informal, peer-based models of rehabilitation. As was the case with the men at the Skid Row weight pile, neighborhood inhabitants may have already imbued the mega-shelters and their intensive rehabilitation programs with negative symbolic qualities. Police intervention not only failed to produce desired behaviors but it served to actually exacerbate addiction, criminal behavior, and desolation by disrupting inhabitants’ meaningful spatial practices. Rather than understand police intervention as a form of therapeutic outreach, men like Tyrell came to view policing as one of the most powerful *obstacles* to the possibility of rehabilitation. Police intervention simultaneously amplified and compounded the effects of territorial stigma, by stripping Tyrell and the others of the symbolic material they had otherwise utilized to carve desired and worthy selves out of their current social and physical location. While their efforts to build a non-Skid Row community from within Skid Row were premised upon an attempt to (sometimes quite forcefully) distance themselves from the social detritus that surrounded their activity, it was community-building nonetheless. As police began to intervene, it not only caused the group to splinter, but it caused the group’s former members eventually give up on these efforts.

By underestimating the durability and role of inhabitants’ existing attempts at recovery and resulting spatial practices, policing strategies served to undermine self-reclamation and, in some cases, may have actually exacerbated criminal behavior. Stripped of the means of



maintaining their sobriety and difference – of their collective efforts to cultivate the Pump – several of the men at the weight pile were unable to preserve their instrumental presence in the neighborhood. Some, like Steel and Big Ron, returned to the very neighborhoods and peer networks that they had worked hard to avoid; to the conditions they attributed to their former periods of offending and their lengthy incarcerations. Several of the others who remained in the neighborhood succumbed to the conditions that they so diligently (and successfully) eschewed only months prior. Defeated and dejected, many of these men adopted a retreatist attitude that I thought impossible throughout my nine months of daily interactions with the group. James’ “Hell with it” statement encapsulates the futility with which some of them came to view their former efforts.

Of course, not all in Skid Row fold as quickly and completely under police pressure. In the next chapter I travel one block north to the corner of San Pedro and Fifth Streets, in order to describe a very different set of inhabitants who, while they may not oppose policing openly, they resist in subtle and subversive ways. In detailing these individuals’ attempts to adapt to the omnipresence of policing in Skid Row, I consider how the informal regulation and social organization of the street becomes structured by (the anticipation and threat of) constant police contact.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “Cooling Off the Block”:

#### Policing and the Regulation of Skid Row Streetlife

In August 2007, I stood next to Jackson, a short African-American man with an unusually high-pitched voice, as he set up his “sidewalk shop” on the southwest corner of Fifth and San Pedro Streets. We spoke casually as he unloaded a battered clock radio, a bundle of women’s cosmetics, and a mass of other found, scavenged, and stolen items from a nearby shopping cart and placed them neatly across an oversized and discolored L.A. Lakers beach towel. Over the next few minutes Jackson made a number of transactions, including the sale of a small plastic lighter to a very thin woman wearing a short dress that hung loosely from her shoulders. Lighter in hand, the woman thanked Jackson and stepped out to the curb where she pulled a small crack pipe from a fanny pack and raised it to her lips. Noticing this, Jackson immediately stuffed the handful of pennies he had received into his pocket and quickly approached the woman. “Hey sweetheart, hey sweetheart,” he called out in a friendly tone. “Look here. I wouldn’t have sold you that lighter if I knew you were just going to use it to spark up like that. That’s not why I’m out here. I’m sorry, I can’t have you doing that stuff with my merchandise.” Acknowledging Jackson’s request, the woman lowered the pipe from her lips. As she began to walk away, Jackson called after her with a smile. “I appreciate it, honey. Have a beautiful day. God bless!” As Jackson made his way back to the blanket, Keith, a round African-American man who I never saw without his signature black leather baseball cap, walked over to Jackson and gave him “dap”

– a local handshake. “She’s a fine looking woman,” Keith said shaking his head, “but that dope has got a hold on her. That’s a good move you made, my man.”

From February 2007 to September 2009, I carried out daily fieldwork alongside Jackson, Keith and fourteen other street vendors who conducted business on this Skid Row street corner. While they each tended to their own shops, the men formed a close-knit peer group with a recognizable set of collective practices. The most notable among these, illustrated in the interaction above, involved prohibiting passers-by from engaging in certain behaviors that the men deemed problematic. In a single three-hour period that I typically spent with the vendors, it was not unusual for me to record ten or more of these instances whereby the members of the group stepped away from their wares to sanction drug activity, pick up trash, quell arguments, and monitor pedestrian traffic. Given their outward behavior, I was immediately struck by how closely the vendors resembled what Jane Jacobs (1993 [1961]) famously referred to as “public characters.” According to Jacobs (1993 [1961]), public characters constitute the proprietary “eyes on the street” that, because of their constant presence and surveillance, are able to produce safety, stability, and predictability in even the most “disorderly” of neighborhoods and urban spaces. As she famously stated, “the first thing to understand is that the public peace...of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves” (40). Yet, the social conditions of urban life have undergone pronounced changes in the five decades since Jacobs (1993 [1961]) first penned these ideas. With the wide-spread proliferation of broken windows policing since the early 1990s, municipal governments have embarked on overt campaigns to replace public characters with patrol officers as the primary guardians of the public peace, community standards, and behavioral norms. Given

these shifts, this chapter asks how this recent trend has affected the order-maintenance functions of public characters in Skid Row. Has their role in public space been altered? And if so, what kinds of conditions and behaviors now occupy the gaze of the “eyes on the street”?

### **Policing, Social Control, and the Organization of Street Life**

In the last chapter, I introduced some of the “spill over” effects of Skid Row policing on inhabitants’ everyday lives. I demonstrated that officers’ coercive interventions served to marginalize and undermine indigenous forms of recovery and self-help while eliminating the very conditions that were necessary to maintain lasting peer groups. Yet, as pervasive as policing may be, not all in Skid Row are as easily overwhelmed as Flex and the others at the weight pile. In this chapter, I consider the manner in which inhabitants attempt to persist by taking up more subversive responses. Rather than folding under the weight of broken windows policing, neighborhood inhabitants strategically adapted to the constant threat of impromptu and unexpected police sanctions by restructuring their daily routines, behaviors, and peer group dynamics. I illuminate this process by directing attention to one particular group of street vendors who, like Jackson, developed substantial measures of informal social control. Engaging with the influential ethnographic work of Mitchell Duneier (1999), I demonstrate that while their informal regulation of the sidewalk may have initially appeared as though it were designed primarily to reinforce the therapeutic influences of the neighborhood, a more comprehensive analysis, taking account of the relationship between informal and formal social controls, reveals a far more complicated picture. I show that highly-moralized efforts to maintain civility, sobriety, and mutual respect in public space that both a casual observer and a passing police

officer might notice may, in actuality, be rooted in concerns of material expediency and driven primarily by an underlying desire to preempt detrimental police contact. In addition to exploring alternative responses to policing, I aim to illuminate a social process that is applicable to other neighborhoods in which this form of policing has taken hold. In a context in which police detainments, citations, and arrests loom constant, policing plays a vital though often-overlooked role, fundamentally (re)shaping the social organization of community life.

### *Studying Street Corner Men*

There is a long tradition in urban sociology of studying groupings of what can be referred to broadly as “street corner men” (see Whyte 1955; Liebow 1967; Anderson 1976). In an effort to understand the social organization of the slum, ghetto, or other so-called “disorderly” neighborhoods, sociologists looked to these groups to determine how, despite economic and social insecurity, residents in these areas maintained a social structure capable of providing stability and civility. Often these studies gave little, if any attention to the role of the police in shaping group behavior; a pattern that was perhaps as much a reflection of the conditions of these neighborhoods throughout the twentieth century as it was a reflection of a larger research agenda to find “order within disorder.” These studies tended to ask how order is preserved in such areas despite the absence of, or abandonment by, agencies and agents of formal social control.

With the proliferation of the broken windows theory across the United States and the globe, urban ethnographers will be increasingly forced to amend this research agenda to more fully account for the fact that police officers have become fixtures in the urban landscape, ever

more present in the lives of research subjects. To date, Mitchell Duneier's (1999) *Sidewalk* represents what is perhaps the most explicit and systematic effort to make sense of this trend. Studying social life on the streets of New York during William Bratton's tenure as head of that city's police department, Duneier (1999) investigated the introduction of new measures of formal social control on what he calls "the largely invisible social structure of the sidewalk" (314). Drawing on Jacobs (1993 [1961]), Duneier (1999) argued that the broad collection of magazine/book vendors, scavengers, and panhandlers saturating the sidewalks of New York's Greenwich Village surpassed Jacobs' (1993) [1961]) idea of public characters. Beyond promoting an elevated level of safety and welfare, Duneier (1999) found that these individuals activated what he termed "the rehabilitative forces of the sidewalk" (43-80). Amidst "the confluence of many forces...some global (deindustrialization), some national (stratification of race and class and gender)," sidewalk entrepreneurship helped to facilitate decency, mutual respect, and morality, constituting a means by which those at the bottom of the economic and social hierarchy could motivate one another to live "better" lives. Sidewalk entrepreneurship existed as an alternative to drug dealing and abuse, criminal behavior, and the extreme form of retreatism – what Duneier (1999) called the "Fuck it!" mentality – associated with homelessness and social disintegration. The vendors became mentors, sponsors, and "old heads" for their struggling peers and the young men of the ghetto. However, Duneier (1999) argued, with the imposition of stringent municipal ordinances and broken windows policing policies, these public characters were increasingly forced to operate within an environment that was hostile to their existence. As a result, the complex system of social regulation, and its associated benefits, otherwise worked out informally along the sidewalks were undermined and, at times, wholly eliminated.

While Duneier (1999) has provided an exemplary account of the new urban reality, his analysis has become the subject of harsh criticism. In “one of the most-widely discussed book reviews in the history of American sociology” (Gowan 2009: 231), Loïc Wacquant (2002) contended that in Duneier’s (1999) attempt to account for the benefits of street vending, he ultimately presented a “sanitized” account of his subjects in a series of “Kodak moments.”<sup>44</sup> First, in an effort to present the vendors’ informal social control as driven by inner moral virtues, Duneier (1999) took the statements of his informants at face value, conflating “vocabularies of motives” with social mechanisms, confusing the “reasons invoked by vendors to make sense of their actions with the causes that actually govern them” (Wacquant 2002: 1480). Wacquant (2002) further argued that Duneier (1999) ignored the “structural forces...the criminalization of the urban poor, the conflation of blackness and dangerousness in public space...that directly shape and bound the material and symbolic space within which vendors operate” (1480). As a result, Wacquant (2002) concluded, *Sidewalk* systematically overlooked analyses of expediency and power, ultimately failing to consider the possibility that “the pursuit of morality is neither the sole spring or exclusive design of [vendors’] actions” (1479).

In this chapter, I utilize an analytic approach positioned between the poles of Duneier (1999) and Wacquant (2002) to build on the strengths of each. While I agree with much of Wacquant’s (2002) substantive critique, his profound skepticism of Duneier’s (1999) informants’ claims is perhaps too extreme (for a lengthier discussion see Gowan 2009). While ethnographers should certainly not base their accounts solely on the statements provided by informants –

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<sup>44</sup> Duneier (1999) is not the only target of Wacquant’s (2002) criticism, which is also leveled at the works of Elijah Anderson (1999) and Katherine Newman (1999): “Duneier *sanitizes* the actions and neighborhood impact of sidewalk bookselling by systematically downplaying or suppressing information that would taint the saintly images of the vendors he wishes to project; Anderson *dichotomizes* ghetto residents into good and bad, ‘decent’ and ‘street,’ and makes himself the spokesman and advocate of the former; Newman *glamorizes* the skills and deeds of her low-wage workers, extolling their submissive labor as evidence of their inner devotion to the country’s ordained ‘work ethic’” (Wacquant 2002: 1469, emphasis original).

indeed, actions and the reasons individuals give for those actions should remain analytically separate – we cannot simply dismiss these statements as post hoc justifications. Informants’ often highly-moralizing claims are integral to analyses, as they constitute persistent attempts at self-presentation. Thus, rather than focus on adjudicating the validity of informants’ claims, this chapter considers these performances within the context of broader neighborhood conditions – specifically those emanating from the structural forces cited by Wacquant (2002) – to investigate how inhabitants’ actions, and the justifications provided for those actions, are developed and deployed in a neighborhood characterized by intensive policing.

To do so, I revisit Duneier’s (1999) analysis of the relationship that purportedly exists between informal and formal regulation. As a result of his larger project – to show that those individuals who appeared “disorderly” may actually provide benefits to neighborhood life – Duneier (1999) tended to construct a dichotomy between these two modes of social control that was overly rigid, causing him to overlook the complex ways in which the order maintained by officers interacts with the order maintained by public characters. This chapter demonstrates that far from existing in a zero-sum fashion, these two modes of regulation may actually form a mutually-constitutive relationship, with far reaching implications for the social organization of impoverished communities. During my fieldwork I uncovered a process that Jane Jacobs (1993 [1961]) might have hardly anticipated. The proprietary “eyes on the street” have reconstituted their surveillance and order-maintenance functions to protect public space *not* from unpredictable strangers and dangerous outsiders, but rather from the hindrances caused by the police. As the disciplinary gaze of the police is intentionally internalized, the informal controls that result may have a much darker side than was recognized by Duneier (1999), at times



undermining the rehabilitative potential of the sidewalk, breeding further mistrust, and contributing to the appearance of neighborhood disorder.

### **The Social World of Skid Row Street Vending**

Skid Row, like other impoverished neighborhoods, is characterized by an active informal, “underground” economy (Venkatesh 2009). In February 2007, in order to gain access to this realm, I began conducting participant observations as a street vendor, selling individual cigarettes – referred to locally as “loosies” – for 25 cents apiece along the sidewalks outside of the L.A. Mission. When I began, I had little knowledge about the business other than what I had gleaned from a week of closely watching the other cigarette salesmen who operated nearby. Within a short period of time, however, my daily presence and transactions enabled me to make connections with a number of other street businessmen who integrated me into their social world.



Figure 21. A small sidewalk shop selling canned food.

Jackson, the man depicted in the scene that opened this chapter, was one of the first of such individuals. I met Jackson one afternoon as I walked past the outstretched beach towel that displayed his wares. “Hey you, sir!” he called out to me. I paused, eager to hear what he would say. “You look like an educated man, surely you’re interested in these great books I have here.” He pointed to a stack of nondescript hardcover books. I noticed that each had call numbers typed prominently on their spines. “I got these from the USC [University of Southern California] library, so you know they’re really good. Check them out!” Taking Jackson up on his offer, I opened two of the books – a hardbound geometry text and a weathered copy of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. I smiled when I noticed the USC Library stamp. I introduced myself, informing Jackson that I was a graduate student at rival UCLA. Over the next few minutes I described my research project and asked Jackson if he would allow me to “hang out” with him

while he tended his shop. He agreed, and I spent the rest of the day scribbling field notes between cigarette sales as I watched Jackson interact with his customers. As we said our good-byes, Jackson suggested that I join him the next day. I agreed, and over the course of the next five years, Jackson and I developing a close, though at times rocky friendship.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Jackson moved to Los Angeles in 1977 to work as a machinist in the aerospace industry. With cuts in the sector in the early 1980s, Jackson was laid off, spending the next three decades bouncing from one temporary position to the next. His employment prospects were even further hampered in 1992, when Jackson was convicted of armed robbery, serving four years in prison. Compounding this issue, when Jackson was released and was able to secure employment, he injured his back in an industrial accident. Fortunately, with the money he gained from a legal settlement, he was able to begin taking mechanical engineering courses at Los Angeles Trade Technical College, which he supplemented with a Pell Grant. Unable to keep up with classes, however, his funding dried up. In 2005, Jackson and his wife of 23 years were evicted from their Inglewood apartment. Living solely on their combined General Relief payments of \$221 a month, the couple moved into subsidized room in an SRO hotel on Skid Row's western flank.

“That’s when we got into crack,” Jackson told me shortly after our meeting, as we sat in a downtown diner discussing his biography. “There were just too many drugs around. We met a lot of new friends, and they were all doing drugs, so when we started kicking it with them, we started doing a lot of drugs too. At that place you got people knocking at your door at all times of the day. It’s easy to fall into it.” Throughout 2007, Jackson spiraled deeper into addiction. His mood swings became far more drastic, his tone with customers, and with me, quickly shifted from eager and friendly to nervous and desperate the longer he went without a hit.

Neither Jackson nor his wife had the income to keep up with their growing addiction. In late 2006, Jackson began stealing textbooks from the bookstores at the L.A. Trade Technical College and USC, and reselling to other bookstores across the city. As a supplement, Jackson began scavenging downtown for items that he could vend along the streets of Skid Row. These “knickknacks,” as Jackson referred to them, ranged from clothing and cosmetics, to small electronics, books, and canned food. Each day, Jackson loaded his wares into a baby stroller or a shopping cart, and laid them out along the sidewalk at the corner.

With Jackson’s help, I quickly got to know the fourteen other vendors that regularly set up on Fifth and San Pedro Streets. This did not always unfold as smoothly. Despite the fact that Jackson consistently “vouched” for me, several of the men remained suspicious of my “real” intentions. Stevie, a tall and sinewy African-American with a gold front tooth, was one such individual. Stevie remained convinced for several months that I was actually an undercover police officer. Much of his hesitance had to do with his recent arrest, a factor that had also propelled him to take up street vending. Unlike Jackson, Stevie vehemently asserted that he was not a drug addict. As a “spiritual weed smoker,” Stevie had formerly used marijuana on a daily basis, particularly when he read his bible. In 2006, Stevie was arrested in one of the “buy/bust” drug stings detailed in Chapter Two, in which undercover narcotics officers enlist inhabitants to assist them in acquiring drugs.

“So I’m sitting there minding my own business, and this white guy comes up and hollers [speaks] to me. A homeless guy. Or, at least I *thought* he was a homeless guy. So he asks me if I got any weed. I say ‘no,’ even though I did have some on me. All I had was my own personal stash. I ain’t no dealer and I don’t sell the stuff. But he just keeps standing there, and he says he’ll pay me \$50 for a gram of weed. For a gram! So I’m thinking to myself, ‘damn, this is an

offer I can't refuse.' That's more than double what I paid for it. And me being the entrepreneur I am, of course I sold it to him. So I give it to him and 'bam,' a bunch of cops show up and put me in handcuffs and take me to jail. He wasn't a homeless guy at all. He was a cop with a good disguise. I'm talking a *good* disguise. He had three shirts on and one of them had ring around the collar!"

After spending two weeks in jail, Stevie was mandated to serve a year of probation at a halfway house located just south of Skid Row. Between mandatory group meetings, counseling sessions, and church services, Stevie left the house (sometimes in direct violation of the rules) and returned to Skid Row to visit with friends and make "walking around money," setting up his own "sidewalk shop" next to the other vendors. Stevie's inventory primarily contained items that he himself depended upon to overcome the boredom of the halfway house. Unlike Jackson, Stevie did not immediately spend his profits to support his drug addiction. As a result, he was able to accumulate far more capital, which he re-invested into his business, compiling more capital-intensive products. This primarily included audio CDs – both original and pirated – and incense, which Stevie sometimes manufactured himself, using thin wooden sticks and fragrant oils sold in the wholesale district. Given the security and limited space at the halfway house, Stevie was limited to items that could easily fit in his backpack.

Conducting daily fieldwork at the intersection of Fifth and San Pedro Streets, I was able to closely observe how men like Jackson and Stevie conducted their business, maintained the peer network, and contributed to the neighborhood's larger informal economy. Over the course of almost three years, I documented how the men developed a unifying set of collective practices. Most notable among these, they instituted a system of informal regulation to enforce behavioral standards and control the conditions that characterized their immediate setting.

### *Regulating the Corner*

From the first day of my fieldwork alongside the vendors, one observation emerged as particularly striking: the men on the corner actively prohibited any of the individuals and groups nearby from consuming or selling drugs within their view. My field notes are filled with instances in which, upon noticing an individual attempting to roll a marijuana blunt or load a crack pipe, one of the vendors would take several steps toward the person, reprimand them, and shoo them away. “Yo dog,” an imposing vendor named Craig would routinely call out in deepened voice when he observed someone preparing to get high. “Put that shit back in your pocket and walk on. Take your stash and dip [leave].” As I began to develop my own knowledge about the neighborhood, I realized that the frequency of their interventions was largely a result of their geographic location in the area’s drug ecology. Setting up their shops on the corner of Fifth and San Pedro Streets put them a block between San Julian Park and Crocker Street, locations referred to by the media and police spokespersons as the busiest “open air drug bazaars” in the southern California region (Rivera 2006; Winton 2007). Those who “scored” drugs at either location walked quickly from the completed transaction toward the corner of Fifth and San Pedro, before pulling their stash out to get high. While they were frequently startled by the vendors’ sudden reprimand, they more often than not obeyed the commands, hurriedly crossing the intersection with the confused look lingering on their faces. In the event that individuals were too engrossed fiddling with their paraphernalia to realize they were being addressed, someone like Craig would take a few more steps toward them, raise his voice and repeat himself. If this

was still unsuccessful, the other vendors might add their voices until they produced the desired result.

The swiftness by which the vendors came to each other's aid was especially important when dealers, rather than users, brought their activity into their vicinity. Some dealers conducted their hand-to-hand transactions "on the move," walking alongside their customers to better conceal their activity from anyone who might be watching. While they typically walked past before any of the other vendors noticed or addressed them, it was not rare for these dealers to pause directly in front of the vendors to more easily complete the hand-off. Once, a young African-American man in crisp clothing and bright red sneakers approached with a disheveled African-American and Latino man walking closely behind. He stopped to dig into his pockets, pulling out a small clear bag that he handed to one of the men in tow. Keith, a round African-American man that had been watching the man closely called out immediately. "Hey man! Yeah, you! I can't have you pushing that poison over here. That shit ain't cool." Expectedly surprised, the young man addressed Keith: "Eh pops, mind your shit." Keith snickered in response and replied, "Listen sucker, this *is* my shit." Craig chimed in, "It's mine too," as he pushed past his customer, taking a step toward the dealer. A nearby vendor named Slick joined in, stroking his long greying beard, "You heard the man. Push on!" "I'd listen to 'pops' if I were you," bald-headed Larry called out from his own shop, positioned the furthest away from the commotion. "Come on, fuck these assholes," the young man said to his two customers, as they followed him in the direction of San Julian Park. Without skipping a beat, the vendors turned back to their previous activities.

There were certainly occasions when the vendors were outnumbered by groups of nearby users, or instances when users refused to relocate. While these interactions might end with the

involved parties hurling obscenities at one another from opposite sides of the street, I never once observed an attempt to curtail drug activity escalate into violence. More typically, when the vendors ran into obstinacy, they tended to shift their tone, couching their efforts in more moralistic terms. When this occurred, commands to “push on” evolved into what Stevie, one of the more vocal of the men on the corner, referred to as “teaching moments.”

One afternoon I stood with Stevie joking about the L.A. Lakers. Suddenly, Stevie cut our conversation off mid-sentence. I recognized that he was closely watching three African-American men standing twenty feet away, struggling to light their marijuana blunt despite a strong breeze. “Ah damn,” Stevie said under his breath as he moved toward them. “Look at this shit.” He gave me a hand motion to follow him. He called out to the group as he made his way closer. “Hey, fellas. You gotta press on [move along] with that business.” One of the men smiled and shot Stevie a few placating words, “Aight, aight. We’ll bounce in a sec.” Stevie shook his head. “Look guys, you see all these people out here on this corner? They don’t want to have your weed in their lungs. Some people are trying to kick their habits and clean up. You think this is good for them? How are they going to do that with you blowing chronic [marijuana] in their face, huh?” The men did not acknowledge him. He turned to me as I approached his side. He spoke loudly, his statements seemed to be directed both toward me and the group who were finally successful in lighting their blunt, and had begun passing it in a rotation. “There is a reason why this place gets such a bad name,” Stevie complained. “It’s because people like these guys got no respect for other people. Some people act like they deserve a bad name. How are we going to make this place better for women and kids when we got people out here only looking out for themselves? We have to be unselfish if we want things to change.” The men had begun walking away and Stevie fanned the lingering smoke with his hand. “That’s what I’m trying to



show these little G's [young men or aspiring gangsters] when I talk to them. I'm only one man, but at least I can take care of my little zone of influence down here. It's a problem because the young guys are impressionable. When they see one guy over here slanging, they'll say, 'Oh damn, that's what I want to do. I'm going to do that too.' Then everyone down here has an even bigger problem than before."

While the vendors along Fifth Street took an opposite approach to nearby drug-related behaviors compared to Flex and the crew at the weight pile, the two groups similarly utilized their responses to drug activity as a means of carving out their own positions within the neighborhood structure. Rather than utilize these instances to prove that they were "out of place" in Skid Row, the vendors utilized these interactions in a way that positioned themselves at the top of the area's social hierarchy, to affirm their "O.G. status" as mentors and guardians. They were quick to articulate that their presence was a much-needed corrective for the many social ills that plagued the neighborhood.

Larry, who was far less vocal than Stevie when it came to sanctioning drug behavior, cited his mere presence on the corner as a curative force; as a vendor he was also a role model. "I'm not so hip about getting all up in people's business, so I think I try to just lead by example. Look at me. I used to slang rock around here and I mended my ways. Now I'm out here showing these guys that they can get out the game [stop selling drugs] too. Life ain't all about Escalades and bitches, you know? You have to be able to look at yourself in the mirror every day. How are you going to do that when you spend your day making people's lives worse? I want to show these young bucks around here that there's something else out there for them. They're smart. That's obvious if they're hustling. They can take their hustle legit like I did. I can show them how."

Their project of “leading by example” extended beyond simply prohibiting drug activity. The group also took proactive steps to improve the material conditions of the neighborhood. As they arrived at the corner and laid their blankets and inventory out, it was standard for the vendors to kick the abandoned Styrofoam food containers, cups, and other debris from the sidewalk into the gutters, which were cleaned multiple times per week by city maintenance crews. Larry often went beyond this, earning the nickname “Mr. Clean.” This moniker referred to more than just his shaven and shiny bald head. When one of the Business Improvement District (BID) workers wheeled their trashcans through the neighborhood picking up debris, Larry often got up from his milk crate, jogged over, and borrowed one of their brooms to sweep the entire sidewalk around the vendors clean of cigarette butts and other small pieces of trash. “I want to show people that come walking by that we *can* keep the streets clean,” Larry told me when I asked him about this routine. “We’re humans. We don’t have to live like cockroaches in a mountain of filth. All it takes is for all of us to have a little respect. It’s all about respecting your home and your neighbors, whether you’re in Skid Row or in Pasadena. For a lot of people down here, this sidewalk is their home. It’s their bed at night. For the rest of us, it’s the front porch, you know? Especially if you’re living in one of these SROs. It goes hand in hand, respect for your home and respect for yourself. It’s all connected.” I frequently observed Larry politely alert passers-by if they dropped trash from their hands. “Excuse me, you dropped your gum wrapper,” he might say in a calm voice. Sometimes pedestrians obliged and stopped to retrieve the items. If not, Larry was quick to walk over and kick the piece of trash into the gutter or put it in his pocket until he found a trashcan.

### *Questioning the Rehabilitative Forces of the Sidewalk*

While none of the vendors had read *Sidewalk* – a fact that I confirmed with each of them – I was struck by how closely their self-declared role in neighborhood life paralleled Duneier’s (1999) claims about the inherent “rehabilitative forces of the sidewalk” (62-63). According to the men, one of the primary effects of their presence and activity was that they embodied, and thus demonstrated the importance of mutual respect. For them, mutual respect primarily meant that before acting, an individual should consider the consequences that their actions may have on others. The men articulated that this was particularly important in a place like Skid Row, where individual problems quickly became collective issues, with wide-ranging collateral consequences. Consuming drugs in public space, for instance, jeopardized others’ attempts at sobriety. As they stepped away from their sidewalk shops to prohibit drug use on the corner, men like Stevie often claimed that they were assisting to at least temporarily remove the temptations felt by those struggling to recover from drug addictions. Further, by reducing the amount of marijuana or crack smoke that lingered in the air, Stevie seemed to be reducing the likelihood that he or anyone else might inadvertently fail a drug test and violate the conditions of probation. At other times, the respect the men attempted to foster on the corner was directed toward wider concerns. The men saw themselves as capable of intervening in the lives of younger men in the hopes of steering them away from drug and criminal activity, demonstrating that less illicit opportunities existed to secure an income. At a larger level, the men presented these measures as a limited, yet effective method of altering some of the unsavory stereotypes that plagued the neighborhood. With diligent effort, they offered, they could improve the public perception of Skid Row and its inhabitants.

Encountering what appears to be an incredible level of collective benevolence, one is compelled to ask: How did this distinct form of sidewalk regulation develop? And why does it take the form that it does? Answering these questions requires contextualizing the vendors' informal regulation within the broader circumstances on the corner, in particular the parallel and competing social controls exerted by Skid Row officers. Once we examine the vendors' actions under this light, it becomes clear that much of the voluntary regulation, rehabilitative ethos, and associated moral claims arose primarily out of the vendors' preoccupations with officer intervention, which had the capacity to wholly eliminate their economic enterprise and livelihoods. Consider the following incident in which informal and formal measures of control intersect on the corner.

#### Stevie Receives a Citation

At approximately 1:15pm I met Keith near San Julian Park and we walked the block to the usual spot at the corner of Fifth and San Pedro. I handed him the plastic bag with the twenty CDs I had burned, taking him up on his offer that we could split any profits that were made from them. We spotted Stevie already set up on the southeast corner, as he occasionally did, outside one of the doors of one of the neighborhood's only take-out restaurants. We crossed the street and headed in his direction. He stood in front of a few assorted items spread across a small, light blue blanket, as he conversed with a customer. As we passed and stood ten or so feet away, I listened as he completed a transaction for two packages of incense. Keith had begun talking to two other men that he seemed to know quite well. I waited to say hello to Stevie. But, as he stuffed his money into his pocket, Stevie's attention turned not toward me, but back toward the

nearby corner, toward the source of the thick odor of marijuana that wafted downwind to our direction.

“Come on ya’ll,” I heard Stevie shout as he walked toward a group of four young African-American men, who appeared to be in their mid to late twenties. They were taking turns puffing on a marijuana blunt. If they had heard him, they did not show it. In one quick motion, one of the men, wearing a black do-rag, passed a tightly folded wad of cash to another man in a Dodgers cap. “Smoking, serving [dealing], ya’ll know ya’ll can’t be doing that mess out here on the corner.” Keeping an impressively cool demeanor, the man in the Dodgers cap leisurely looked Stevie up and down, shook his head slightly with a look of disapproval, and returned to his conversation with one of the other men. Stevie remained standing in the same position but continued, “Ya’ll need to take that somewhere else. Up the street. Come on now.” His tone was more pleading than commanding. The man in the cap responded this time. “Look G, just do your thing and don’t worry about this, aight? Aight?” He emphasized this last word, taking on a far more intimidating tone. Stevie did not respond, but remained standing in his position.

At that moment, I heard the familiar “One Time” call behind me, travelling quickly in my direction down San Pedro Street. I looked to my left as a squad car swiftly passed, coming to a sudden stop. Two officers emerged and approached the group of young men. I realized that they had not noticed that the man in the cap had broken from the group and had disappeared into the Chicken House. The blunt that the men were smoking had also disappeared. “See this now?” Stevie called out in a vindicated tone to the three men who remained. I kept my distance but remained within earshot as the officers interrogated the men and eventually told them to “move along,” at which point they turned their attention toward Stevie.

“Is this your stuff?” The closest officer asked.

“Yeah, that’s mine.” Stevie responded hesitantly, a dejected look on his face.

“You know you can’t be out here selling this stuff, right?” We have to keep these sidewalks flowing and you’re blocking people who are trying to get by.”

Stevie pleaded his case. “No, see, that’s why I set all the stuff up against the wall, so that it’s not in the way. I don’t want to block the sidewalk.”

“Well, it’s not about whether you’re *trying* to block it or not. The reality is that you *are* blocking it. When people come over here, they start to bunch up because of you. It turns into a big mess. Then people have to walk out in the street, they can get hit by a car, and they can’t get into the shop there. It’s a public safety issue. And frankly, it’s against the law.” By the time he finished his sentence, the officer had already pulled out his citation book. Despite Stevie’s continuing pleading, the officer wrote Stevie a citation for 41.18(a) – blocking the sidewalk – and instructed him to pack up his items and move along. Stevie turned back and began slowly placing a few items from the blanket into his duffle bag as the officers got into their car and pulled away.

Within only a few moments, the man who had escaped into the Chicken House reemerged and the others resumed their semicircle in their original position. Stevie noticed them as he was bending over his blanket, put down the stack of CDs he held, stood up and began calling out to them in a loud voice.

“See! This is what I was talking about. I told ya’ll not to be doing that shit around here. But you young bucks are too hard headed to listen. Now ya’ll is messing with my livelihood. I understand that you got your own business to tend to, but there’s spots for that. And this ain’t one of them. Head up to the park with that mess.” He grabbed the CDs and slammed them into his bag. The men looked at Stevie but did not respond as he continued. “You saw those cops.

They stopped over here because of *your* asses, not mine. And look, I got caught up in the crossfire. They would have just drove right past, but ya'll gave them a reason to stop. I would have been fine."

One of the young men shook his head. "Yeah, whatever, old man."

I waited several minutes as Stevie finished packing his things. I kept quiet until he approached Keith and me as we leaned against the wall.

"Don't even bother today," Stevie said to Keith. "The corner's too hot with these motherfuckers pushing weed out here."

"Damn, they're slanging right there?" Keith asked in response.

"And smoking too. I bet the cops smelled that shit all the way up the block."

"How long they been out?"

Stevie sighed as he responded. "Only a few minutes, but they already got the cops rubbernecking [watching intently from their patrol cars as they drive past]. I was fine all morning, but as soon as they show up, the first car that passes by and 'woop' here they come, telling me to pack up my shit."

"Why don't they just go up to the weed corner?"

"That's what I was telling them," Stevie complained, clearly exasperated. "That's what I was saying. It's some bullshit. Their heat rubs off on everybody else out here. They just cost me two hundred bucks!" He waved the ticket in the air in front of him. "*Plus* the money I'm not going to be able to make today. I should send the bill to those little jackasses." With this, Stevie hoisted his bag up onto his shoulder and jaywalked across San Pedro Street, complaining to himself under his breath.

“Damn,” Keith said, looking toward the corner. “The cops in that car are gonna be back around. They’ll circle a couple times. And if they radioed in to the switchboard, we’re going to have every cop looking real hard, even *if* those guys take off. There’s too much heat right now, so they’ll give me a ticket for sure.” Keith suggested that I join him when he returned later in the afternoon. “We gotta let the block cool down before we come back out.”

This incident is revealing in that it introduces a critical factor – the threat of police sanctions – that informed the men’s attempts to regulate nearby behaviors. As the temporal and spatial distance between the informal controls of the vendors and formal controls of Skid Row officers is narrowed, it becomes clear that the two did not exist independent of one another. Far from it. Stevie’s sanctioning of the drug use on the corner was employed in anticipation of the arrival of officers in an attempt to preserve his profit-making opportunities.

### **“Cooling Off the Block”**

As the above interaction begins to demonstrate, much of the informal regulation exerted by the vendors was, in actuality, an attempt to reduce the amount of “heat” on the corner – the physical and social conditions in the immediate vicinity that the men believed to increase officer scrutiny and raise the probability of attracting police attention. While visible drug activity and filth along the sidewalk may indeed have constituted a problem by undermining respectful behavior, sobriety, and positive public perceptions as the men insisted, it had far more immediate and impactful consequences on their livelihoods. These conditions prompted the patrol officers driving past to exit their squad cars in order to detain and interrogate any and all individuals standing on the corner. Even if officers did not formally invoke the law in the form of a citation,



arrest, or confiscation of inventories, they rarely returned to their cars without instructing the vendors to pack up their wares and vacate the area, ultimately forcing them to suspend their activity for several hours. However, the vendors found that if they could manage the conditions on the corner well enough, officers were unlikely to give them much attention, allowing them to continue in their activities. The men thus worked to keep the level of problematic behaviors and general deviance taking place on the corner at or below the levels characterizing the rest of the neighborhood; an effort that extended deep into the vendors' business practices and had far-ranging implications for how they ascribed peer group status, resolved interpersonal disputes, and negotiated spatial and racial identities.

#### *Amending Business Practices to Reduce "Heat"*

While tending to their shops, the vendors developed and refined a series of folk theories regarding the kinds of scenarios and appearances that tended to produce officer intervention. Drawing upon each other's interactions with officers they generated hypotheses about exactly what kinds of behaviors increased the "heat" on the corner. By analyzing the details of the citation or arrest of a fellow vendor, the men deduced how they themselves might better avoid the same fate. Using this method, the men traced a significant amount of officer intervention to particular business practices and behaviors that took place on the corner. While the vendors were already employing this method when I began my research, it became intensified and explicit roughly four months into my fieldwork, when Shawn, a soft-spoken African American man with matted, greying hair, was arrested.

Shawn had first moved to Skid Row in 1989 after a dishonorable discharge from the Navy. Using crack for the first time, Shawn quickly spiraled into addiction. He slept on the Skid Row streets until successfully kicking his addiction and moving into an SRO hotel in 2001. After several arrests, Shawn took up street vending in 2006. "I'm just a hustler," Shawn told me once as we shared an order of fries at a diner on Main Street. "I couldn't live on 200 bucks a month so I had to hustle somehow." Whereas Jackson utilized vending as a means of acquiring quick cash for his next hit, Shawn sought to re-invest or save his profits in the hopes of eventually moving out of Skid Row altogether. "I never really wanted to be here this long," he complained once. "I'm tired of this place, but every time I get arrested or go to jail, I come out and have to start all over again." Re-investing his profits into his sidewalk shop, Shawn dealt in more capital-intensive knickknacks that he bought in the wholesale district or from other neighborhood inhabitants.

In the summer of 2007, Shawn was arrested for making felonious criminal threats. Eventually serving six months in jail and receiving a strike on his criminal record the arrest was largely the result of a feud that had escalated with another neighborhood resident during the previous two months, regarding Shawn's choice of inventory. At the time, Shawn had accumulated an inventory that was comprised of lighters, cigarettes, and DVDs, including a number of pornographic titles. Shawn's products also included a packaged set of kitchen knives that he had purchased from a passerby in need of quick cash. One day, Shawn noticed a man standing nearby taking pictures of him. He approached the man and asked him to stop taking pictures. The man refused, and continued photographing anytime he saw Shawn out on the corner. This led to multiple verbal confrontations over the next week. "He was trying to 'expose' what was going on in downtown, like all the bad stuff," Shawn recapped for me after his release.

“He said that I was hurting the community with the stuff I was selling, so of course I got all up in his face and cussed him out. It wasn’t like I had the knives and the porn out in the open. I really was trying to hide it from the kids. I wasn’t trying to be a bad influence.”

As part of his effort, the man complained about Shawn to one of Skid Row’s Senior Lead Officers (SLO). The next week, the SLO drafted and distributed a newsletter that, while not mentioning Shawn by name, accused him and others of hurting the Skid Row community by selling knives and pornographic material. Discovering the leaflets while walking down the sidewalk, Shawn felt unjustly attacked and, similar to the confrontation with his senior officer that resulted in his military discharge, struck back. First, Shawn drafted his own newsletter, titled “Beware the Deceptacon [sic],” and posted it on telephone poles, tree trunks, and buildings throughout the neighborhood. Referring to the SLO by name, he calls him an “incompetent, lazy, and a mad dog on a leash with [his] white superior officers holding the other end,” who only “pretends to be a friend of the homeless.” Second, Shawn confronted the man who had been photographing him. While to this day Shawn insists that he was falsely accused, the police report states that Shawn threatened to choke and kill the man. The SLO arrested Shawn several days later as Shawn was walking out of his SRO hotel.

It did not take long for the news of Shawn’s arrest to reach the corner. I was standing with Keith, Slick, Jackson, and two other vendors when one of Keith’s friends approached and informed us of the day’s events. For the men, the arrest was more than just the result of a prolonged, personal feud between hot-headed Shawn and a fellow neighborhood resident. Rather, it was an important lesson on the influence that could be leveraged by a single disgruntled customer. “It shows,” Slick lectured us that afternoon, “that the next time you see that guy that you wouldn’t give a discount to might be on the god damned witness stand. I’m

saying, now these bitches can just run and snitch if you piss them off and your ass is locked up. Shit's fucked up." The men also interpreted the SLOs newsletter as evidence that some Skid Row officers had begun to perceive their economic activity as detrimental to the community, which brought them even further into the police crosshairs. Shawn's arrest catalyzed a profound shift in how the vendors conducted their business, revising their inventories, customer relations, and relationships with officers.

### Inventories

As the most immediate of these shifts, many of the vendors began to take greater care to consider the way in which their inventories would be perceived by others, including both customers and patrol officers. Many of those who sold pornographic DVDs moved these items off their blankets, instead keeping them out of public view within their shopping carts and backpacks. Some did this only when they anticipated police presence while others made this a permanent practice, only removing them to show to regulars and other customers that they trusted. Sometimes they allowed customers to peruse the titles without taking them out of their bags. Slick relayed the tension he now felt in deciding what to do with his remaining collection of pornographic movies. "The butt naked movies are the best sellers. That's what moves the fastest out here. As a businessman I can't really get rid of them. The problem is that some people see a bunch of tits and ass out here on the sidewalk and they get uncomfortable. For some people that got a screw or two loose, that can set them off the deep end, make them act out and want to rape somebody."

Some of the men took Shawn's arrest even more seriously. One day I noticed that Stevie, who primarily sold CDs and incense, had eliminated lighters from his inventory. I found this particularly intriguing, considering the fact that those who bought incense would also likely need to buy a lighter. When I questioned Stevie about his decision, he acknowledged the potential loss of profit, but made it clear that he had weighed it against the costs related to the "heat" that lighters brought. "Oh sure, I could keep selling lighters. Shit, lighters are only like six bucks a box. Even if I sell them for fifty cents each, I can make 25 bucks a box. That's good money! But I don't want to be selling them anymore because they contribute to crack addiction. I don't want to be a part of supporting that. People see that and think I'm supporting it." Stevie pointed toward the park. "They figure it's like, get your crack over there and get your lighters over here. I'm not trying to deal with that bullshit."

In the subsequent months, Bishop, an older vendor with grey dreadlocks who often bragged of being an fourteen year veteran of Skid Row street sales, went so far as to completely alter his inventory, replacing his collection of "knickknacks" with framed prints of movie characters, hip-hop icons, and religious images that he purchased in bulk in the wholesale district. "There's no way somebody's gonna get all twisted over what I'm selling," he informed me one day. "The only things these pictures do is inspire people to do better. When they look up at this picture of Jesus, they get hope and feel closer to God. That's what people around here need. What I'm trying to give to them." I questioned Bishop about the positive benefits that were conveyed by his print of late rapper, Tupac Shakur, depicted holding an outstretched gun. Bishop had a quick reply. "Shit, that gun don't even matter. Tupac is a hero for black people. He was a role model for young men, always talking about how we gotta try to get out of the ghetto." Beyond communicating that his economic pursuits do no harm to the health of the neighborhood,

Bishop, like Stevie, advanced that his inventory set an example for others. “Since I started figuring out what people in this neighborhood *really* want, I can sell a lot of these in a single day. I pick up about fifteen at a time and I have to make two or three trips back to the store when I sell out. You see, I can pay all my bills with this. *All* my bills. That means I don’t have to be on GR [General Relief] or any other kind of assistance. No welfare, no nothing. Other people see me and they realize that they can do this kind of thing too. They don’t have to have their hand out or depend on somebody else to take care of them.”



Figure 22. A sidewalk shop with extensive inventory.

## Customer Relations

Following Shawn's arrest, there was also a pronounced shift in the tone and general manner in which the men interacted with customers. Even Jackson, who was already among the most amiable of the vendors, expressed a need to improve and closely monitor the quality of his customer service. "You never know if somebody is going to take offense to something that you say to them, or if they'll be offended even by something that they overhear you saying to somebody else. They might get pissed off and go running up to file a complaint at the police station or tell [the SLO] or something." In order to override any perceptions that their activity might be harmful to the neighborhood, the men began reframing their enterprise as a philanthropic endeavor during interactions with customers.

Carter, a middle-aged African-American with long, chemically-processed straight hair, was regarded as one of the shrewder negotiators of the group, who derived a great satisfaction in haggling over prices. "The real secret to negotiating over a price is being ready to walk away if you don't hear the terms you like," he informed me once, smiling after making a particularly lucrative sale that included two jars of cocoa butter lotion, a pack of Newport cigarettes, and a battery-operated beard trimmer. While he was known to brag, his bargaining methods were rather straightforward. Carter typically inflated the price of his products, allowing customers to "convince" him to lower his price, feigning disappointment at having been "out hustled" until his customers walked out of earshot. After Shawn's arrest, however, I noticed that Carter began altering his haggling strategy. Instead of basing negotiations on price alone, Carter attempted to convince customers that he was providing a much needed community service.

Consider the following interaction. I watched as a large African-American woman attempted to convince Carter to lower his asking price on three cans of tuna, two cans of chili, and an extra-large jar of peanut butter. “I don’t see why I you can’t go down to eight dollars,” she insisted. “Shoot, I can just go over to the market across the street. They got the same exact stuff, probably fresher too, and it ain’t been sitting out in the hot sun all day.” Carter allowed the woman to finish before replying in a calm voice. “Sure, you could go over there. They might be a little more expensive, actually. But check it out, have you seen who runs that place? Do they look like you or me? No ma’am. Most of these stores are run by Koreans. You think that money stays in this neighborhood? You think they pass that along to black business owners like me?” The woman seemed unconvinced. “Well then I could just go over on Gladys over to where the churches be giving this stuff away for free. Then I don’t gotta pay nothing at all.” “That’s true, that’s very true,” Carter responded again in the same calm voice. “But then you’d be walking all around the neighborhood trying to figure out where those do-gooders are parked today. And what if you get over there and they’re all out of stuff? You got all sweaty and tired for nothing. That’s why I’m here, sweetheart, to save you your time. Time is precious, and time is money. You’ve got better things to do with it. I can’t give this to you for free, of course, but I’m trying to make your life easier *and* I’m trying to help out this community at the same time.” His final words seemed to appease the woman, who handed Carter two five dollar bills and collected the items.

Relationships with Officers



Shawn's arrest also prompted several of the vendors to attempt to cultivate more favorable relationships with officers, particularly with the SLO involved in the confrontation. No one exemplified this strategy more than Warren, an attractive and clean cut African-American man with a broad, bright smile. A self-described "wanderer," Warren spent his life throughout a handful of U.S. cities after graduating high school in North Carolina. In 2000, Warren developed aspirations of beginning a career in the entertainment industry and moved to Los Angeles, where he rented an SRO unit on the western edge of Skid Row. Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, Warren sometimes disappeared for a week or two in order to work as an extra for the television shows, movies, and commercials that were constantly filming throughout downtown. He used the money he earned "on set" to purchase candles, body oils, incense, and other personal hygiene products in bulk quantities at various stores located in the nearby wholesale district. Warren sold these items with a significant mark-up along Fifth Street. Among other things, this meant that Warren's inventory costs were significantly higher than most of the other vendors, a distinction that prompted him to seek out additional ways to preempt the disruptions often brought by police contact.

"If I get a ticket or if they decide to arrest me, I'm totally fucked," Warren said to me once when I accompanied him on one of his trips to "re-up" his inventory.<sup>45</sup> He leaned against a glass display case at the entrance of a perfume store, examining a box containing thin, test-tube samples of imitation designer cologne. "Some of these guys get popped and it might take them a week or two after they get out to build back up their shop. Since I tend to sell more quality shit like this, if I get popped, that's hundreds of dollars sitting in a cop's trunk. It'll take me weeks,

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<sup>45</sup> The men utilized the term "re-up" to describe any effort to acquire more goods to sell. Interestingly, "re-up" was also a term utilized by other individuals in the neighborhood to refer to low level drug dealers acquiring additional product from their suppliers.

no, months to get it back. I'll have to book another commercial to scrape up enough cash flow, and that shit's unpredictable sometimes."

A week after learning of Shawn's arrest, Warren began what he described to me as "taming the market." For two days, he left his goods in his room and spent afternoons sitting on a bench in Gladys Park, smoking cigarettes. He spotted the SLO on the second day and immediately approached the officer, introduced himself, and stood in conversation for several minutes. "He was actually pretty cool when we were just standing around shooting the shit," Warren recalled. "What did you two talk about?" I asked, incredulously. "No, seriously," Warren defended, "I just talked to him about what I'm trying to do out here. He was really hip to it. I just told him why I moved out here, where I'm living, how I've been doing commercials and now I'm trying to get hooked up with an agent. He was asking about the TV shows I was in. You know, a lot of people around here hate the guy, but he's nice enough when he's not trying to put you in handcuffs." After their initial interaction, Warren began to go out of his way to engage in regular conversations with the SLO.

Much to the surprise of many of the other vendors who, like me, remained skeptical about the effectiveness of Warren's strategy, this newfound relationship with the SLO proved advantageous. I arrived on the corner one afternoon to an excited and animated conversation between Larry, Carter, and two other vendors. Larry smiled as he recounted an incident from the day before. Larry, Warren, and another man had been tending to their shops, speaking with customers, when two officers suddenly appeared on the sidewalk. Just as the officers were preparing to issue them citations and confiscate their items, the SLO came walking around the corner and intervened. According to Larry, the SLO informed the officers that the citations would not be necessary. "So he says to them, 'I know Warren, he's a good guy. He's going to be

a star. We need more go-getters like him around here.’ I’m standing there like, I can’t believe what’s going on right now.” According to Larry, although the SLO eventually instructed the men to pack up their shops for the day, Warren’s efforts prevented any further repercussions. “This guy’s untouchable!” Larry loudly exclaimed as he concluded the story. The news of the incident spread quickly throughout the group. A number of vendors, including Larry, resolved to develop more amicable relationships not only with this particular SLO, but with some of the other officers that they encountered on a regular basis.

As part of this effort, several others worked together to amass collective knowledge about particular officers’ personalities and schedules, adjusting their practices to suit the tendencies of those currently on duty. “Who’s out here today?” A tall, mustached vendor named Terrance would inquire nearly every day when arriving on the corner. “I saw the lady-cop pull by earlier,” I heard Stevie report once. “You know, the Mexican one. And I think she’s on her period, too. All week she’s been jumping out on [exiting her car and detaining] all the pushers [dealers] up and down the block, getting all up in their face and shit. So you better be sure to keep all of your skinemax [pornographic] movies in your bag today. Try not to be a jackass either. We don’t need to give her any more excuses to fuck with us, too.” While the men completed the day without a single contact with the “lady-cop” or any other officer for that matter, their concern with the female officers’ mental state was illustrative. Not only had the men developed new general rules governing vending in the wake of Shawn’s arrest, they had also developed a set of situationally-dependent strategies that corresponded to the readily-shifting variables that might increase their probability of drawing police attention.

The vendors' modifications to their inventories, customer relations, and relationships with officers emerged simultaneously with their efforts, described earlier, to reduce the levels of drug activity and filth on the corner. Together, these measures grew out of an underlying concern with, and attempt to skillfully manage, the image that they projected to those wielding coercive and formal means of social control. Yet, as I detailed, crafting a favorable image was no simple task. It required the men to develop a folk sociology of policing. Employing a kind of "double interpretation," the men analyzed previous interactions with the police to better interpret officers' general perceptions about the Skid Row neighborhood and its most harmful conditions and behaviors. In adjusting the conditions on the corner to appear less problematic, the vendors continually attempted to interpret how their own revised actions would be evaluated in officers' eyes. To be effective, the vendors' folk sociology of policing required them to develop knowledge not only about policing, but also about the behaviors that were most likely to be policed. In short, acting as the "eyes on the street," the vendors devised a way to, in a sense, "see like a cop."

"Seeing like a cop" was exemplified in the strategies the vendors employed in order to distance (the appearance of) vending from (the appearance of) drug dealing. From the first through the tenth of each month, when General Relief, SSI, and other welfare checks are distributed in Skid Row, the neighborhood's sidewalks bustle with increased activity. With the influx of cash into the area, many of the vendors noted that they were capable of making as much profit during these ten days as they were throughout the rest of the entire month. Despite the economic boon, however, this period also raised the likelihood of sudden police contact. Based on their interactions with officers in the later summer months of 2007, the men theorized that Central Division leadership had begun to deploy additional patrol and narcotics officers in

anticipation of an increased number of drug transactions.<sup>46</sup> The vendors reasoned that with more officers on the street casting a more watchful gaze, the threshold for police intervention was significantly lowered. As a result, many of their otherwise routine and unproblematic behaviors would now be interpreted as suspicious.

To counteract this process, the men honed two vending practices that they employed at the beginning of each month. First, they were diligent to reduce the size of the crowds that formed around their shops. They constantly requested that any pedestrians that stopped to engage in conversation along the nearby sidewalks continue walking. The vendors were also far more active in making sure that customers looking over their items were more evenly distributed around their blankets. “We can’t let the sidewalks get all bottlenecked,” Keith told me once after shepherding a group of women past his shop. “So you don’t get a ticket for blocking the sidewalk?” I asked. “Well, that, yeah.” Keith responded with a disapproving look on his face. “But more because it was payday this week. The narcs [undercover narcotics officers] come flying by and if they see a pack of people on the sidewalk they always assume that at least one of them is slanging. They figure, ‘somebody’s got to be a dealer, so let’s put everyone against the wall and find out.’ Even if they’re wrong they don’t care because they figure they did their job. But what they’ve done is fucked us out of doing *our* job!”

The second practice the men employed during this time period was over-dramatizing their hand-to-hand transactions. Reasoning that officers expected drug dealers to try to conceal their interactions with customers, the vendors believed they could mitigate officer suspicion by making their own sales even more conspicuous. Stevie was particularly attentive to this performance, likely due to his previous arrest at the hands of a well-disguised undercover officer.

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<sup>46</sup> I confirmed the vendors’ theory in conversations with Skid Row officers.

“Let’s just say there’s an undercover sitting right there on the corner,” he explained to me, crafting a hypothetical scenario. “You probably won’t be able to see him. Maybe you’ve got your back to him, but he’s watching you. You’re not doing anything wrong. Shit, you just made a good, honest sale. When you go to take that person’s money, what does that look like to the officer? He doesn’t know what the hell you just sold. But he’s going to come over here and find out. And unless you want to spend the night in jail just based on some bullshit hunch he’s got about you, you better not let there be any confusion about what the hell you’re doing out here.” At times I found Stevie’s methods somewhat comical. He had a habit of providing loud, step-by-step narration of his interactions with customers, as if to reassure anyone within hearing distance that he was not dealing drugs.

Of course, some of these strategies designed to “cool off the block” were more effective than others. Warren’s successful deflection of police sanctions is a prime example. As the outcomes of different police interactions were compiled and compared to others in the group’s collective knowledge base, certain strategies were increasingly emulated by others, eventually becoming taken-for-granted as standard vending practice. By examining how certain practices became cemented among the group over time, I was more readily capable of observing how the moral order and the so-called rehabilitative forces of the sidewalk actually emerged from a deliberate attempt on behalf of the vendors to shoulder the weight of Skid Row policing by understanding and anticipating police contact.

### *Implications for the Social Structure of the Corner*

Just as certain strategies were more effective than others, some vendors were considered to be much better at “cooling off the block” than others. This had important implications for the social structure of the corner, as a vendor’s status in the group was closely connected to the amount of “heat” he was perceived to attract. Warren’s status, for instance, was noticeably improved as his interactions with the SLO solidified in the lore of the corner. Warren became a kind of informal block captain, as many of the others began to defer to him to adjudicate their disputes, serve as an unofficial liaison to Central Division, and provide protection from unwanted police contact.

One afternoon I sat by as Stevie and another vendor, named Chico, bickered with each other between interactions with customers. Stevie, who had laid out a relatively small number of items was upset that Chico had taken up a large section of sidewalk. Chico had unpacked an entire shopping cart worth of wares onto two adjoining blankets, and had hung an assortment of clothing on the chain-link fence behind him. Stevie kept repeating that Chico was an “eyesore,” and repeatedly asked him to pack up some of his items to sell on another day. In response, Chico provided the counterargument that if he contracted his inventory, he might lose out on profits if a customer was looking for one of the items that he removed from his blankets. Clearly exasperated, Stevie was relieved when Warren arrived, quickly interrupting Warren as he set up his shop, complaining about the recent disagreement. Without much description, Warren immediately made his way over to Chico. “You got to think about other people out here, Chico,” he began. Chico cut him off. “I *am* thinking about other people. I’m thinking about my customers who need the shit I got.” “But that’s actually disrespectful,” Warren continued in a calm voice. “Look, it’s simple. When [the SLO] comes rolling by here, what do you expect me to say to him? You want me to just say what’s been going on? That you don’t care about any of

the other people trying to get by out here? I'm always talking to him about how we got entrepreneurs out here, and how he can be civil with us. We're all grown men. We don't need to be fighting with him, or with each other. Look at this, man. Your shi..." He caught himself. "Your stuff is all over the place. I bet you can still make money today if you just put half that stuff back in your wagon. Can you compromise, my brother?" Chico did not provide a counterargument. Instead, he and Warren exchanged "dap" – a local handshake – and he began packing up some of his items.

Two weeks later, I arrived at the usual spot surprised to find it empty. I quickly noticed that Carter, Bishop, and Terrance were set up on the opposite side of San Pedro Street, on the southeast corner. As I crossed the intersection to join them, I held my hands out in confusion. "We relocated," Carter informed me as I reached the curb in front of them. He described a compromise that he witnessed Warren negotiate with the SLO. "So we were over on the other side yesterday and [the SLO] comes rolling up like he was gonna do something. Warren went and talked to him. When they were done talking, Warren said that [the SLO] said that they were going to really start busting people for blocking the flow of the sidewalk for a few days. Sit, [the SLO] was cool though. He said that this side over here is out of his jurisdiction, so he wouldn't trip if we moved. But I don't know how long I'm gonna post up [be here] today. Warren was supposed to be out here like an hour ago. We're still waiting for him to make sure this all goes down like it's supposed to. To make sure [the SLO] keeps his word." Warren did in fact appear twenty minutes later, and the vendors did not have a single interaction with officer in the two hours that they tended to their relocated shops. They remained in this location for two more weeks before slowly making their way back to the opposite corner, once Warren decided that an appropriate amount of time had elapsed. Thus began a new trend in which several of the vendors,



including Carter and Terrance, began intentionally adjusting their own vending schedules to ensure that they would be on the block alongside Warren. “I’m one of the best hustlers in all of downtown,” Terrance told me during this time. “You can ask anybody around here and they’ll tell you that. But ain’t no hustle worth a damn unless you got connections. My man Warren, this guy’s got the right connections.”

While Warren’s status in the group improved on account of his ability to reduce unwanted police interventions, other vendors’ statuses suffered on account of their “heat.” Jerome was a stocky man in his sixties originally from Oakland, California, who spoke often of his extensive involvement with the Black Panther Party and a handful of other black nationalist groups in his younger years. Perhaps as a result of his past political commitments, Jerome’s interactions with officers were far more antagonistic than Warren’s, or that of any other vendor. As if he needed additional fuel for his hostilities, over the course of a single week in December 2007, Jerome was detained three different times for illegal street sales. The first two instances only resulted in citations, but the third resulted in an arrest. When he was taken to the Central Division station for booking, Jerome attempted to shift his demeanor toward the officer. “So I’m sitting there cuffed and I’m pleading with the guy, like ‘Come on, man, I’ve got a wife at home,’” Jerome shared with me when I saw him after his release. “I kept telling him, ‘My wife won’t know where I’m at. She’s got a doctor’s appointment that I have to take her to in the morning.’ And the guy just laughed at me. He didn’t believe me. I was telling the complete truth, too. He said I was just a crack head and I was lying to try to get out of trouble. So I cussed him out. I ended up spending three days in jail on a misdemeanor charge. I hate these motherfucking pigs. And now I’m going to give them a piece of my mind every time I see them.”

Indeed, after his release, Jerome's confrontations with the police only intensified. Now even more brazen, Jerome frequently screamed obscenities at the squad cars that drove past the corner. This quickly infuriated several of the vendors who suffered the collateral consequences of his outbursts. Carter and Keith, for instance, received citations, and nearly had their items confiscated, when Jerome insulted two officers that drove by with their windows open. As the two men tell it, the officers immediately slammed on their brakes and put all three of them in handcuffs. "Jerome's too hot for his own good," Keith complained. "He's too hot for all our good," Carter added. Despite their repeated arguments with Jerome, in which they demanded that he cease angering officers and instigating police contact, Jerome continued his behavior, often defending himself by calling the other men "sell outs" and "paper revolutionaries." But the vendors were not without recourse.

In order to reduce the "heat" that Jerome was bringing to the corner, the group enlisted Skid Row officers to enforce the very order and standards for which the vendors' own informal means of social control had proven inadequate. The vendors' strategy unfolded subtly and wholly unbeknownst to Jerome, or to me, for that matter. Three weeks after his arrest and at the height of his outbursts, I sat on a milk crate in the usual location with Jerome, Carter, and Terrance. As was typically the case, Warren approached thirty minutes after the other men had set up. After Carter teased Warren for "being on CPT," the two men spoke quietly fifteen feet or so from the rest of us.<sup>47</sup> Afterward, Warren greeted the rest of us, but did not set up his shop. Instead, he walked quickly across San Pedro Street and disappearing around the corner. Minutes later, as Jerome fiddled with his cellphone, I observed Carter quietly conferring with Terrance. Before I had realized it, Carter had packed his shop and also headed across the street. I watched

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<sup>47</sup> The men often used the acronym "CPT," which stands for "colored peoples' time," when others, particularly Warren, arrived later than they had indicated that they would.

as Terrence also followed suit. As he began to walk away, Terrance gave me a subtle head nod and a hand signal that I did not quite understand. Confused, I remained on the corner with Jerome, spending the next five minutes scribbling field notes. When I looked up from my notebook, I noticed that Warren, Carter, and Terrance had unfolded their inventories, and were setting up their shops across the street. “I can’t stand that jackass,” Terrance complained when I walked over to them. “I’m saying, this nigga’s too hot.” Terrance’s contention was put to the test half an hour later when a squad car pulled onto Fifth Street, moving slowly past Jerome. “Watch this,” Terrance said in a low voice, as he walked to my side. Yet Jerome did not yell at the squad car, as Terrance seemed to be expecting. Instead, he raised his right hand, giving a silent, though prominent middle-finger to the two officers driving past. In seconds, they were out of their car, putting Jerome in handcuffs and loading his wares into their trunk.

As the squad car pulled away, Warren filled me in. Two days earlier, Warren was issued a citation for blocking the sidewalk. He reasoned that perhaps Central Division was intensifying patrols on the block again, as the SLO had previously warned. It was this information that I saw him whispering to Carter when he had arrived, instructing him to further relay it Terrence and me, but not Jerome. The plan was to allow Jerome to continue vending amidst intensified patrols. “I’m thinking ‘Maybe he could use a trip down to the station. Maybe it’ll wake him up.’” “The man’s too hot,” Carter quickly added in a defensive tone. “You have to think of it this way, it’s not like we called the damn cops, right? It’s not like we were the ones putting the handcuffs on the guy. Shit, he took care of all that himself. We didn’t need to do a whole lot, really. The guy has no idea how to act right.” After a month hiatus, Jerome reappeared on the block. While he had toned down his outbursts, most of the other vendors remained

disgruntled when they were forced to work alongside of him. Some went so far as to refuse to vend anytime that Jerome was present.

Despite the fact that several vendors, like Jerome, remained at the bottom of the group hierarchy throughout the duration of my fieldwork, some were certainly able to improve their once-marginal statuses. This was accomplished primarily by demonstrating a renewed concern with reducing one's "heat." Given his expansive, and consistently growing inventory of "knickknacks," Jackson also attracted the ire of the other men on the corner much like Jerome had. This tension reached its apex in early 2008, when Jackson was unable, or in some vendors eyes' unwilling, to amend his inventory in response to mounting police pressure and new market opportunities.

In January, Kevin, a 32 year-old African-American man who sometimes hung out on the corner with the vendors, acquired a laptop outfitted with a DVD burner. Purchasing blank DVDs in bulk from a nearby wholesaler, Kevin spent evenings in his SRO room copying hundreds of the most popular feature films and pornographic movies. Kevin began selling these pirated DVDs to the vendors at a price of \$25 for 50 discs. Reselling the DVDs at \$3 apiece, or two for \$5, the vendors were capable of making roughly \$100 in profit in the span of only five hours, or in even less time depending on the time of the month. With Kevin as a ready supplier, those who already leaned toward more capital-intensive inventories – including Keith, Carter, Stevie, Warren, and Terrance – began to specialize in DVDs and cigarettes, electing to stop selling any additional products. While it largely undercut many of their previous haggling strategies – not even Carter attempted to frame DVD sales as some kind of community service – it offered a major advantage, in that it significantly reduced their immediate visibility. Now rarely laying out blankets, the men often kept their DVDs stowed away in duffelbags and backpacks, which they

sometimes stashed in planters fifteen feet or so away from them. Some scribbled a “movie menu” on a small piece of cardboard or carried one or two discs that could represent their available selection to potential customers. They no longer ran the risk of congesting the sidewalk and appeared they stood out to a far lesser degree while standing on the corner. “When the cat gets smart, the mouse gets smarter,” Terrance instructed me as he explained why he had decided to specialize. “It was obvious that cops were really stepping it up around here. It ain’t like it used to be when I first started. It was seriously like a swap meet around here, with guys setting up shops up and down the block, and the cops were mad cool. It seems like one day they just decided to put us in their sights. Then it was like once they arrested me a couple times, they knew my name, and my face. After that I was toast. They’re lazy, and they figure I’m an easy bust. One time I had barely set up and here I go, off to jail again.”

Despite the fact that Jackson similarly acknowledged the increasing frequency of police sanctions – in the last two months of 2007 alone he received eight citations and was arrested three times – he did not follow suit by amending his vending practices. Instead of saving up enough profits to purchase a stack of Kevin’s DVDs, after selling a few items Jackson typically hurried off to score more crack. This routine was not lost on the other vendors, who made Jackson’s addiction a recurring topic of conversation on the corner.

“The man’s too deep into his addiction to care about anything or anybody but himself,” Stevie complained one afternoon. “You all saw me, I used to try to help the dude. I used to talk straight up with him about it. But you know how that shit is when the disease takes over. He’s an addict! He looks me dead in the eye and nods his head and agrees with everything I say, talking about, ‘Yeah man, I understand. I’m changing.’ But it’s bullshit. He ain’t changing. You can tell because he keeps all that junk just laid out all over the damn sidewalk, just trying to make a

quick buck. But don't nobody want a dirty ass jacket or a bunch of old toothpaste. And when the cops roll through they can see this man's just trying to pay for his next fix [to get high]. It don't take a genius to see that. So they come up and pop [arrest] him. And when they pop him, they pop the rest of us." Those standing nearby spoke in agreement, and as the conversation continued, several other men echoed Stevie's sentiment that Jackson's personal problems had now become a collective problem.

But before the vendors developed plans to "deal" with Jackson as they had with Jerome, Jackson completely disappeared from the block. He resurfaced four months later, sober and carrying a backpack loaded with Kevin's pirated DVDs. I stood with Jackson, curious to learn of his whereabouts. He informed me that in early February, he was caught stealing a textbook from the bookstore at L.A. Trade Tech. "I just needed more money," he explained. "I was getting desperate, so I was starting to swipe books like two or three times per week. What happened was that one of the employees started to see me coming in and leaving without buying anything. They called the sheriffs, and when I walked out, they jumped on me." Convicted of commercial burglary, Jackson served 93 days in county jail. "It was actually a good thing for me. I had time to reflect and I got clean when I was in there. The first couple of weeks were real hard, but after that I just wasn't craving crack anymore." While he had gained his sobriety, Jackson had lost his SRO room, his personal possessions, and his entire inventory. Yet this was not wholly negative. Upon release, he began staying at the Union Rescue Mission. Without the need to pay rent or purchase food, he cashed his first General Relief check, immediately purchased 50 DVDS, and headed to the corner.

While I was not on the block to witness his reception, in my subsequent conversations it became clear that the other vendors had quickly welcomed "the new Jackson" – as Warren called

him – back into the fold. Beyond alleviating much of the animosity the others held toward him, Jackson entered into a new and improved relationship with the group. The other vendors no longer complained about him, and they no longer avoided being on the corner when he was present. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The men interacted with Jackson openly while on the corner, sometimes exchanging DVDs if they had duplicates they wished to unload. At other times, the once-apprehensive vendors shared profits with Jackson by referring customers to him if they themselves lacked the DVD that a customer requested.

“It seems like you and Jackson have settled some of your issues,” I asked Keith, probing for information on their reconciliation.

“I guess you could say that. But there wasn’t any working it out. Things are just different now.”

“Yeah? What’s so different now?”

Keith seemed to recognize that I already knew the answer to my own question, but humored me anyway. “You mean besides the fact that he’s not hitting that pipe anymore?” he asked with a chuckle. “Sure. Of course. But he’s finally thinking about other people besides himself. He’s not dragging the rest of us down with him. I guess I’d say he finally respects the hustle. I wouldn’t have time for him if he didn’t.”

As Jackson’s reintegration into the group illustrates, his newfound sobriety was a critical factor in carving out a drastically improved status among the vendors. Yet his resulting climb in the group structure did not occur because the men on the corner celebrated sobriety as positive in and of itself, on account of some inner morality, or as part of an altruistic rehabilitative agenda. While I think it is likely that the other vendors held *some* moral judgments about drug abuse, and that some may have commended Jackson’s sobriety if he had reappeared on the corner without

the fresh stock of DVDs in hand, the events throughout early 2008 indicate a much different reason for Jackson's reception. These events highlight the fact that Jackson's addiction led to his ostracization primarily because of the "heat" that it generated. For the men on the corner, Jackson's drug dependence prevented him from upholding the behavioral standards that the others had progressively and diligently developed to reduce unwanted police contact. Jackson's eventual decision to modify and contract his inventory, while made possible by the fact that he was no longer spending his profits on crack cocaine, was applauded precisely because it was perceived as an outward symbol that he was ready to contribute to this collective project; that he now possessed the requisite mutual concern and selflessness necessary to become a respected member of the group.

#### The Racial Contours of "Heat"

I have thus far demonstrated that police contact, or at least the *anticipation* of police contact, shaped the social structure of the corner by providing a principle criterion by which the vendors evaluated social characteristics and behaviors. As I spent increasing time with the vendors, however, I discovered that the effects of Skid Row policing extended well beyond the significance the vendors attributed to vending practices, drug activity, and addiction. At times, the impact of Skid Row policing on neighborhood life was far more pervasive, shaping a host of other, seemingly far removed social processes. Most notably, the vendors' efforts to reduce "heat" informed the meanings they ascribed to race, and influenced the race relations that developed on the corner.



While a small number of vendors were known to make race an explicit topic of conversation – militant Jerome, for instance, consistently referred to Skid Row policing as “apartheid” and “Jim Crow L.A.” – racial concerns came to play a more implicit role in structuring peer group dynamics. Consider the attempts by a novice vendor named Sam to become a member of the group. Like Jackson, Sam similarly attained sobriety and decided to specialize in DVD sales. Yet, while Jackson was reintegrated and achieved an elevated status as a result of his transformation, the vendors only further ostracized Sam, eventually setting him up to be detained and arrested at the hands of Skid Row officers. The vendors’ divergent responses were the result of the fact that Sam looked very different than Jackson and the rest of the group. Sam was white.

When I first met Sam in April of 2007, he had a long, scruffy beard and a mound of curly black hair that had recently begun to grey. He was upbeat, smelled strongly of beer, and walked with a slight limp. Sam had come to Skid Row a year prior, after a long recovery from an auto accident. While driving in North Hollywood in 2002, Sam collided with a pick-up truck at 40 mph. The impact cracked several vertebrae and ribs, shattered his knee, and broke his femur, which resulted in a lengthy and expensive hospital stay. Unable to return to his job with a construction sub-contractor and lacking adequate health insurance, he scrambled to find alternative means of shouldering his bills. In 2004, he moved in with his sister, her husband, and their two daughters in Pasadena. His body began to slowly heal, yet he continued to suffer from debilitating back pain and depression, and spent the majority of the day lying on his sister’s couch, watching television and speaking on the phone with various auto and health insurance agents. He also began drinking heavily during this time. Much as a result, within a year, the relationship with his sister’s husband had grown hostile. After a particularly loud fight in 2005,

his sister kicked him out of her house. He bounced between friends' apartments throughout Los Angeles, where he eventually encountered similar responses. Having exhausted his options, he began sleeping in an emergency bed at the Midnight Mission. On only his second night, however, he was kicked out for being intoxicated after starting a fight with a security guard. At that point he began sleeping on the street, entering the various soup kitchens for food, and using a shopping cart to transport his sleeping materials – a small tent, a tarp, a backpack, and several items of clothing.

It was at this time that Sam serendipitously developed a relationship with Keith and the others on Fifth Street, after selling Keith a small box of assorted music CDs Sam had found in a dumpster. Sam began selling other items – including small electronics, clothing, cosmetics – that he amassed in his cart and transported to the corner. The vendors typically paid Sam between 50 cents and \$2 depending on the condition and desirability of an item and, after a particularly good haul, Sam made up to \$30. Yet, Sam's developing enterprise was taking a physical toll. While he had grown accustomed to constant discomfort in his back, which he primarily medicated with continual swigs from a forty-ounce bottle of Old English malt liquor, the long hours on his feet, the repeated climb into dumpsters, and the pushing of an increasingly heavy cart aggravated his injury. After 6 months his mobility was severely hampered, he was unable to continue, and looked for alternative sources of income. In early 2008, at the same time that Jackson went to jail, Sam applied for, and began receiving, monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments of \$938. With a more stable income, he began renting a room in a residential hotel on Seventh Street.

For the roughly five month span during this process, I did not see Sam on Fifth Street or anywhere else in the neighborhood. The first time I saw him again in August 2008, I would not

have recognized him if it weren't for his familiar smile and the slight hitch as he walked toward me at the intersection of main and Fifth Streets. His face was freshly shaven and his hair was trimmed and combed into place. He wore a clean pair of jeans and a light blue, short sleeved button-up shirt. He had replaced his white-turned-grey Fila tennis shoes with a new pair of black Nikes.

We exchanged greetings and I offered to buy him lunch. We walked to get sandwiches at a nearby Subway, where he filled me in on his recent whereabouts, his SSI and hotel room, and how he was finally "getting it together." As we sat for the next hour I scribbled our conversation in my notebook while Sam described some of the unanticipated effects of his new appearance. There were clear costs associated with his new and improved look. Through a series of police interactions, Sam discovered that as a white, freshly-shaven, and cleanly-clothed man, he was suddenly deemed as "out of place" in Skid Row.

"You know who's sweating [harassing/bothering] me now?" he asked, answering his own question before I had a chance to open my mouth, "the cops. Now that I cut my hair it's like I got a flashing sign that says 'please arrest me.' I used to be invisible, but I've been stopped six times just in the last two weeks. Six times!" I asked him why he had been detained so often. "Because I'm white," he replied matter-of-factly, "and I don't look homeless anymore. It's like racial profiling, but in reverse. It's like once I got cleaned up I got *whiter*, like I washed off all the dirt or something. It started a couple days after I moved into my new place. I'm a nice guy, I like to talk to people. I was just standing out front, on the corner, just talking to my friend. He's black. So the cops pulled up and got out of their cars and put us in handcuffs and searched us, even though we weren't doing anything. Then, they just let him go and kept me there. I was thinking "what's going on here?" I remember they just kept asking me "what are you doing down here."

And I kept saying, “I live down here.” And they didn’t believe me, so I was like, “I live right there,” pointing up to my room. And they kept being like, “No you don’t, tell us what you’re doing down here.” They kept asking me if I was looking for drugs, and they didn’t believe that I lived upstairs. They were like, “Come on, we know you don’t live down here, tell us where you *really* live.” They kept asking me like they were going to catch me in a lie or something.

“I always used to hear black people always complaining about racial profiling and racism and I didn’t really get it. I mean, I got it, but now I understand what they’re saying. It’s not fair. It’s just like everything is backwards down here. Where else do the cops let the black guy go and keep the white guy in handcuffs? They think the only reason why a white guy who looks like me would come down here is to buy drugs or something. But life doesn’t care if you’re black or white or green. There are a lot of guys down here just like me who had shitty luck and are just trying to get back on their feet. But the cops don’t even care. It’s got me looking over my shoulder all the time now.”

The interpretations and implications of Sam’s newfound “whiteness” were not confined to exchanges with officers, however. His new racial identity took on important meanings on the corner, reshaping the interactions and relationships he was able to cultivate with the vendors. A week after our lunch, Sam reappeared on Fifth Street, carrying a large black backpack and a milk crate. Sitting down on the crate, he neatly arranged several packs of cigarettes at his feet and opened the backpack to reveal twenty or so DVD cases. He began the usual solicitation: “Cigarettes, DVDs, cigarettes, DVDs.” During the time that he had spent assisting Keith, Sam learned the logistics of sidewalk sales. With the capital necessary to build his own inventory, Sam made the transition from scavenger to vendor. I was standing between Bishop and Slick as they started laughing loudly. “Somebody’s out here getting their hustle on,” Bishop called out in

a playful tone in Sam's direction. Sam smiled back, nodding his head. "The man's a business man now," Slick added.

But the affection was short lived. I was only able to pick up bits and pieces at first, but there was discontent growing among the others about Sam's reemergence as a fellow vendor. One late afternoon three weeks later, I sat with Slick watching a bootleg copy of *American Gangster* on his portable DVD player when Slick saw that Sam was packing up his items for the day. Diverting significantly from the warm reception he gave him previously, Slick let out a long sigh and muttered under his breath as he reached down to adjust his inventory on the blanket. "Thank god this mother fucker's leaving," he repeated twice. Carter responded by quietly responding, "Couldn't be soon enough." They remained quiet as Sam walked past us on the way to his hotel. As Sam said goodbye, both Slick and Carter responded with a friendly "Peace out" and "Alright now," nodding their heads in his direction. I waited until Sam was beyond earshot before inquiring about their quiet statement minutes earlier.

Since Sam had begun selling DVDS and cigarettes alongside the others I had begun to wonder if the others would remain as welcoming as they had been the first time that he joined them as a fellow vendor. When I heard Slick's sigh of relief at Sam's departure, I initially assumed that this was confirmation that the others now felt that Sam was crowding the market, stealing away potential customers, and hurting their profits. In their responses, Slick and Carter disproved my initial theory.

"You mad at Sam or something?" I asked.

"What's that? Well, I mean, I'm just getting kinda tired of him being out here so much," Carter responded matter-of-factly.

"Definitely," Slick added.

“You guys end up having the same inventory, huh? Is he messing with your prices? You guys gotta compete now?” I continued.

“Naw, man. That ain’t it at all. There’s plenty enough money around here for all of us. I ain’t even sweating that. We’re all cool. Shit, I like the guy, he’s a good man. We even trade movies sometimes if he thinks he needs one of mine. He don’t bring no knuckleheads around and he ain’t pushing [dealing drugs] like a couple of the other fools that come around here. So he alright in my book.” Slick stopped at this.

Confused, I inquired more. “So what’s the issue, then?”

Carter continued the explanation. “I’m saying, ain’t everything up to us. If everything was up to me, shit would look a whole lot different around here. It’s the fucking po-po [police]. That’s the issue. They come rolling by quick and just kinda look over here real fast after they hit that corner.” He pointed over to San Pedro. “A lot of the time they don’t even trip [pay attention], but there’s certain things that we know make them stop and give us shit. Sam sticks out like a sore thumb! When you’re talking about Skid Row, white is black, you feel me? You know the cops are in their cars like, ‘Hmmm, who is this white guy kicking it with all these brothers? This can’t be no good. Let go check this out.’ That’s all it takes and boom, you’re jacked up [detained] with these motherfuckers confiscating all your shit. It don’t even matter if you done something or not. They just need an excuse to come over here.”

Slick chimed in. “That’s right. Sam makes it a little too hot around here. I think if he keeps coming out at the same time again I’m gonna start coming out later. Before it was cool when he used to come by with his stuff to sell cause he was just coming by every once in a while, and there are all kinds of people coming up and down this sidewalk. It’s busy. But now it’s a whole different thing.”

“And that’s just the cops,” Slick added. “He don’t sell the same shit that I do; I sell Newports, and he’s usually selling Camels and Marlboros. But even if he did sell Newports I wouldn’t care. The problem is that the man kind of looks like a mark [undercover police officer]. Nobody around here wants to go digging in their pocket for a quarter if they think a cop is standing right next to them and watching them. They don’t know how it might look. Maybe the cop is thinking they got a weapon or they’re reaching for some dope.

In dispelling my assumptions that his growing [hostility] toward Sam was rooted solely in concern about market competition, Slick and Carter’s statements revealed an alternative source of their sentiments, rooted in explicitly racialized terms and centrally concerned with the consequences of third-party observers. For the two vendors, Sam’s white racial identity was a problem, though not because of any animosity that Slick or Carter harbored toward whites in general. Rather, the mere physical presence of a white man – whether it were Sam or someone else – attracted additional and unwanted attention police attention and caused hesitation on the part of potential customers. Their concern with how Sam might appear to others not only increased the salience of his racial identity, but prompted the vendors to behave in a racially discriminatory way, directing significant attention to regulating the demographic composition of the street corner.

Simply put, Sam was not “black enough” to blend into the neighborhood population without arising alarm. It is critical to note, however, that Sam had only become “white” when he quit drinking and stopped sleeping on the streets. As part of his recovery, Sam entered into housing arrangements, income-generating strategies, and daily behaviors that were empirically identical to those of the other vendors. Due to his racial difference, however, the acts became suspicious in the eyes of officers and, as a result, problematic and unwelcome in the eyes of the

others on the corner. Whereas the men described in the previous chapter devoted significant energy to their performance that they did not “belong” in Skid Row, because of the racial contours of “heat,” the vendors worked to demonstrate to officers that they did in fact belong. Their association with Sam, however, problematized this performance.

As many of the vendors grew increasingly worried about the suspicion they perceived Sam to attract, they ceased their previous efforts to protect him from police contact. The vendors, like many in the neighborhood, participated in an informal system by which they warned each other of pending police presence. The warning system was simple yet effective. When an individual spotted officers, they would yell out “One-time!” – code words that indicated that officers were near and approaching. The vendors relied on the waves of these “One-time” calls, that frequently swept along the sidewalks a hundred feet or so in advance of squad cars, to provide the vital seconds necessary to readjust their outward appearance and inventory to better avoid unwanted police scrutiny. In late 2008, however, largely initiated by Carter, the vendors stopped participating in the system when Sam was on the corner. While they themselves certainly continued to rely on the warnings to look inconspicuous, they did not pass the calls on to Sam, who they had crowded off the corner to a location further away from the corner.

I stood on the corner one evening near Carter, Stevie, Slick, and Sam. A squad car approached along San Pedro and paused at the stoplight as the driver waited to turn onto Fifth Street and pass in front of us. Rather than call “One-time” as they usually would have, Carter, Stevie, and Slick quickly closed their bags and dispersed quietly in different directions. Sam, who had pulled twenty to thirty DVDs out of his bag and lined them up on the sidewalk to show to a customer, was suddenly the only vendor remaining on the block. When the light changed, the squad car’s siren began to squeal as the officers pulled to the curb in front of Sam. After



fifteen minutes of questioning and searching, the officers put Sam and his wares into the car and drove off. As was the case with Jerome, the men had enlisted the police to sanction an individual whose presence they disapproved of. In both instances, they found way to strategically increase the “heat” on the corner in a way that brought about the exact results that they otherwise labored to avoid. Although they acknowledged that the arrest had brought too much “heat” to resume their vending that evening, the men expressed feelings of satisfaction. They reasoned that Sam would spend several days in jail, which would at least temporarily minimize the amount of attention officers might devote to their activities. Even more pleased after two weeks passed without sign of Sam, the men assumed that he had simply given up on vending. However, several months later it became clear that Sam’s absence was not due to a change of heart. As the others would soon learn, Sam had become *too* specialized, which opened him up to even harsher criminal penalties.

### The Contradictions of Competent Vending

The switch to DVD sales could not reduce police contact forever, and the detainments, citations, and arrests eventually resumed. While specialization was taken up to reduce “heat,” the resale of pirated DVDs gave rise to its own set of legal dilemmas. Initially unknown to the vendors, possession of over 100 pirated items was considered a felony offense, punishable by multiple years depending on the quantity of contraband. This meant that the very same practices that distinguished certain individuals as the most competent vendors, that best conveyed the standards of mutual respect and unselfishness valued so highly among the group were also responsible for subjecting the men to lengthy periods of incarceration.

This contradiction was hard-learned as judges began handing down extensive sentences to several of the vendors. Sam, Jackson, and Shawn, less than a year since his previous release, were the first to be arrested and convicted, each of them sentenced to over a year in prison. The rumor mill on the corner being what it was, the other vendors were conscious to never let their inventories eclipse 99 discs. Despite their efforts, the momentum of policing was already underway. As the vendors amassed unpaid citations, warrants were issued for their arrest. With each arrest, sentences increased and they became increasingly recognized by Skid Row officers. Former strategies to reduce police scrutiny proved ineffective, as officers began detaining and investigating them on sight. Like Keith, most of the men took this as a definitive signal to give up the DVD business. “I knew it was time to get out when they started calling me by my name. I be standing on the block not working and I hear them on their loudspeaker, ‘Mr. Waters, you got anything in that bag that might get you in trouble?’ I felt like a marked man. I had to keep my nose cleaner than ever.”

While most of the men completely ceased selling DVDs, they did not fully exit the informal economy. Several took up hustles that, while far less lucrative, did not carry such steep penalties. Carter, a trained barber, began cutting hair across the street from the park. Bishop and Warren made money recycling the massive amount of cardboard boxes discarded daily by nearby wholesalers. Among a range of odd jobs, Larry began assisting at the nearby shipping warehouses, helping direct the drivers of eighteen wheelers as they reversed their trucks into loading docks. Stevie and Terrance, two of the men who had had less frequent run-ins with officers, went further underground and began dealing marijuana. This meant that while they continued to inhabit the very same sidewalks that previously housed their “shops,” they now engaged in the exact behaviors that they had so actively prohibited and decried only months

prior. Furthermore, their new enterprise required them to adopt a very different set of practices, standards, and informal controls in order to manage the new contours of “heat” they would encounter.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter set out to examine how the proliferation of broken windows policing in slum, ghetto, and so-called “disorderly” neighborhoods has impacted the informal social controls exerted by “public characters.” Building upon the ethnographic work of Duneier (1999), I investigated how a collection of fifteen street vendors exerted social control over the sidewalks in Skid Row. I found that rather than stemming from the inner moral virtue or civility described by Duneier (1999), the vendors’ (often-moralized) informal regulation – whether prohibiting drug activity, cleaning nearby sidewalks, eliminating controversial products, improving decorum with customers, or developing bonds with officers – stemmed primarily from an attempt to reduce unwanted police scrutiny and contact.

This finding prompts a reconsideration of the relationship between the informal controls provided by public characters and the formal controls supplied by the police. Rather than exist in a rigid dichotomy and interact in a zero-sum fashion, this chapter has demonstrated that these two categories of regulation may become mutually-constitutive, at times bleeding into one another. As the vendors’ effort to avoid attracting police attention intensified, it became increasingly difficult to pinpoint exactly where formal regulation ended and where informal regulation began. Once the men on the corner came to learn precisely what conditions and behaviors were most readily targeted for elimination by Skid Row police, they began redirecting

their informal regulation to preemptively eliminate these exact conditions and behaviors before officers ever arrived onto the scene. In this manner, the vendors internalized and amplified the gaze of the officers who patrolled them. Whereas Duneier (1999) argued that public characters and the police perceived and regulated sidewalk life in inherently divergent and conflicting ways, I demonstrated that in their attempt to escape aggressive policing, Skid Row vendors came to define the “problems” on the corner in ways that mirrored the definitions held by officers. The two were so aligned that in their attempts to sanction problematic and suspicious individuals, men like Warren and Carter began to act as surrogates to formal regulation by emulating and activating police intervention.

In doing so, these men also perpetuated and reinforced the territorial stigma pressing down upon those residing in the neighborhood. Unlike Flex and the others at the weight pile, Warren and the men on Fifth Street worked hard to outwardly prove that they “belonged” in the neighborhood. In order to avoid the police scrutiny that resulted from appearing too “out of place,” they labored to demonstrate that not only were they *in* Skid Row, they were very much *of* Skid Row. They adopted and coercively compelled others to adopt the behaviors of someone who might “typically” be found in the neighborhood. At the same time, they consciously worked to at least superficially demonstrate to officers that they did not constitute a threat to the recovery functions of the neighborhood.

While my own findings depart from Duneier’s (1999), they do not necessarily refute his larger contention that the criminalization of public characters is detrimental to the safety and welfare of public space. That argument may continue to hold true. Rather, these findings problematize the proliferation of aggressive broken windows policing by showing that this development has significantly altered the form that voluntary controls may take in those

neighborhoods where this model of policing is applied. The account presented in this chapter forces us to ask, what kinds of public characters do we desire? While the blurring of the line between informal and formal regulation certainly had some beneficial effects – for example, the public characters of the corner actively prohibited crack use by fellow Skid Row inhabitants – it also brought about changes in the social organization of the corner that were far less encouraging. Most notable among these, it served to reshape the social structure of the peer group by creating new criteria against which the men assigned social status, elevating a new set of traits as most worthy and valued. Importantly, those at the top of the social hierarchy were not positioned there because of their commitment to neighborhood welfare or their rejection of criminality. In fact, at times it was quite the opposite. A vendor's status in the group rested squarely on how well he could deflect police interventions. In Warren's case, his elevated status was premised on his ability to develop a feigned and instrumental relationship with officers. While this may have appeared to reflect the kind of community participation that policing advocates and scholars have long celebrated, these relations with Skid Row officers were catalyzed by inhabitants' desires to separate themselves from the police and inhibit their efforts. Conversely, Sam's social status suffered on account of the police attention the other vendors perceived him to attract. Given his newfound sobriety and improved living conditions, Sam's "whiteness" became problematic precisely because of the revisions to the vendors' social structure and system of social control. Sam's eventual incarceration at the hands of the other group members demonstrated how the informal regulation developed on the corner was actually serving to undermine the rehabilitation potential of the neighborhood.

In reconsidering the relationship between informal and formal social controls, this chapter has shown that policies like the Safer Cities Initiative reshape neighborhood life in ways

that extend well beyond those most frequently measured by researchers. Beyond its capacity to impact crime rates or alleviate citizens' fears of crime, this form of policing reaches deep into the social organization of communities. In a neighborhood context in which policing has become omnipresent, inhabitants become forced to employ strategies to better shoulder the impact that unexpected and unwanted police interventions inevitably have on their daily lives. One prominent method of doing so is to develop a folk sociology of policing – what I term “seeing like a cop” – that is capable of rendering officers' actions more legible. Neighborhood inhabitants understand that officers are more than just legal and bureaucratic agents following formalized dictates; they recognize that officers are meaning-making agents who enact discretion as they attempt to efficiently enforce a particular spatial order (see Bittner 1967; Herbert 1996). By becoming folk sociologists of policing, inhabitants attempt to discern those meanings, ascertain motives, and explain why officers respond the way they do in particular situations and contexts. Skid Row street vendors, for example, generated and collectively tested hypotheses regarding what kinds of behaviors and individuals officers considered most “problematic” in Skid Row. With this information, neighborhood inhabitants put themselves in a better position to modify nearby conditions, or the visibility of those conditions, in a manner that either inhibit or compel more favorable police interventions. “Seeing like a cop” thus operates on two levels. First, it provides policing's targets with a way of better understanding police action. Second, it provides these individuals with a means by which they can strategically manipulate and subvert that police action.

Given the fact that the police possess a unique and exclusive authoritative mandate, folk sociologies of policing are not wholly limited to aggressively-policed neighborhoods like Skid Row. Far from it. We will discern attempts to see like a cop in every situation in which an

individual, group, or organization has contact with police and desires a specific response. Yet, most citizens go long stretches without the need to re-envision their world as an officer might. For some populations, however, like those residing within the boundaries of Skid Row, it is a skill that has become necessary for daily life. As my account of the Skid Row vendors illustrated, a moment of inattention or an incorrect “reading” of officer behavior can land an individual in handcuffs or behind bars.

While their folk sociology of policing often proved successful in reducing the “heat” on the corner, even the “coolest” of vending practices eventually resulted in increased police sanctions. As more vendors were convicted of felonies and sentenced to serve multiple years in prison, most of the remaining vendors took up new economic ventures. Whether a vendor went further underground or attempted to “go legit,” however, his efforts remained complicated by the fact that officers nonetheless continued their consistent detainments, citations, and arrests. For some in Skid Row, however, adaptive survival amidst constant policing was no longer an adequate response. In the next chapter I explore an additional, more proactive reaction to the criminalization of Skid Row life, by detailing a group of inhabitants who overtly resist the Safer Cities Initiative.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Policing the Police:

#### Collective Resistance and Neighborhood Frames

On a late afternoon in April of 2009 I followed closely behind “General Dogon,” a tall African-American man dressed in military garb, as he led three similarly clad members of his “Community Watch” team on a patrol of Skid Row. Holding clipboards, camcorders, and still cameras, they paused at the corner of Sixth and San Julian Streets, scanning the street scene for any police officers. Without warning, a squad car screamed past us at top speed, its siren piercing through the rest of the noise on the block. Dogon gave me a quick shout before breaking into a sprint, chasing the car eastward along Sixth. The camera hanging from Dogon’s arm flailed as he sidestepped several men sleeping on the sidewalk. The rest of us followed suit, running closely on his heels. The police sirens grew louder as we approached the next corner, illuminated by pulsating red and blue lights. I followed the Community Watch team as they pushed through a group of onlookers to the front of a growing crowd. They raised their cameras and trained them on six LAPD officers surrounding an African-American man in handcuffs. As two officers emptied the contents of the man’s pockets onto the hood of their squad car, Dogon and another team member inched closer to record audio as the officers began their interrogation. Suddenly, one of the officers noticed the group, ceased his search, and called out to Dogon by name. A nearby officer joined suit, sticking out his tongue while another officer pointed his camera-phone at us. After a brief distraction, however, they returned to the task at hand. In ten minutes, they un-cuffed the man and sent him on his way. Dogon immediately moved over to the officers and



launched into a barrage of questions: “Why did you handcuff and search that innocent man? Is that how you treat *everyone* in downtown? Do you like harassing homeless black people?”

Without hesitation one of the officers responded. “He was jay-walking in a high crime area. He might have been a drug dealer or might be a parole violator. We couldn’t tell until we put him against the wall first.” Dogon and his team exchanged glances and looks of satisfaction as the officers climbed back into their cars and pulled to an intersection several blocks away. Dogon watched from afar as the officers stopped, exited their car, and handcuffed a man who was walking across the street. Without exchanging a word, Dogon broke into a sprint, streaming down the sidewalk to begin recording again.

Conducting daily patrols of Skid Row, Community Watch represented a collective response to policing that existed in stark contrast with those detailed in the previous two chapters. Rather than attempt to avoid or decrease contact with the police, Dogon and his Community Watch team actively sought out officer intervention and intentionally induced police interactions. These efforts were undertaken as part of a larger campaign by the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN) – a grassroots community organization comprised of homeless and impoverished Skid Row inhabitants – to oppose the Safer Cities Initiative and its related policing policies. In 2005 LACAN launched its Community Watch program to address abuses experienced by Skid Row inhabitants at the hands of private security guards and police officers. In addition to mitigating repression, the program generates evidence for use in civil litigation, criminal defense, and political mobilization. This means that Community Watch plays a reverse role as compared to the “neighborhood watch” activities that have grown popular in more affluent and middle-class neighborhoods. Rather than mobilize citizens to support the

police in their law enforcement endeavors, increasing the efficiency by which officers intervene to address suspicious activity, Community Watch is devoted to undermining this efficiency.

In this chapter I move away from the subversive adaptations employed by the vendors on Fifth Street to examine how Skid Row inhabitants overtly resist new forms of policing. As a number of scholars have recently noted (DeVerteuil et al. 2009a; DeVerteuil et al. 2009b; Herbert and Beckett 2010), we know very little about how homeless and extremely impoverished populations challenge broken windows and related policing policies. While much of the current research has been helpful in drawing attention to an increasing punitiveness in public space, it largely ignores how those most affected by these policies challenge the wave of measures designed to criminalize their behaviors, clear them from the streets, or place them behind bars. Drawing on over two years of daily fieldwork on Community Watch patrols, and almost five years observing LACAN's broader community organizing efforts, this chapter aims to address this lacuna, providing an in-depth analysis of the most overt resistance occurring in Skid Row.

### **Resisting the New Social Control**

As DeVerteuil et al. (2009b) argue in their review of the social scientific literature, there is a dearth of empirical investigation of resistance to contemporary policing trends. As a result, research has overwhelmingly tended in two polar directions. On one hand, resistance is often ignored or overlooked. Given the critical and highly emotive tone of the writing on the “punitive turn,” homeless and extremely impoverished populations are often portrayed as powerless, stigmatized, and hapless victims that are simply (and inevitably) stream-rolled under quality-of-life laws and aggressive policing strategies. On the other hand, when resistance is considered, it

is often romanticized, either assuming a ubiquitous character in which every act of survival is considered a form of resistance, or it becomes limited to forms, such as riots, that are as rare as they are spectacular. Beyond their clear oversimplifications, current research remains ill-equipped to explain why some targets of policing take up resistance while others do not. Why do some individuals engage in collective and organized opposition while others elect to adapt or flee?

In this chapter, I employ Mario Small's (2004) concept of "neighborhood frames" to more fully examine how collective resistance develops, the form it takes, and some of the outcomes that are possible within a context of aggressive broken windows policing. The idea of "frames" arose primarily out of the work of Erving Goffman (1974). Frames are the schemata of interpretation that organize social experience by governing the subjective meanings we assign to events and occurrences. Frames enable us to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" the world at large (21). Neighborhood frames then, refer to "those categories that filter our perception of the neighborhood in which we live, [that] bear a relationship to an ongoing story that we have about the neighborhood" (Small 2004: 76). Rather than see and experience the characteristics of their neighborhood "as it is," residents' neighborhood frames highlight some aspect of the neighborhood and not others. As a result, neighborhood frames affect how that resident will act in and toward their neighborhood. In his ethnographic research on a Puerto Rican barrio, Small (2004) utilized this concept to better explain different levels of resident participation in neighborhood affairs. I extend the idea of neighborhood frames to explain the responses taken up when marginalized populations are confronted with unfavorable policing policies.

I begin by describing the development of LACAN's Community Watch program. Engaging in daily confrontations with Central Division officers, LACAN attempted to supplant

the dominant image of the area as a marginal, denigrated space with their own perceptions of Skid Row as a viable and supportive community, home to residents worthy of being treated like any other citizen. To do so, Community Watch utilized tactics designed to alter immediate officer behavior while generating evidence of police mistreatment. In detailing these tactics, I show that while neighborhood frames are undoubtedly powerful in structuring the actions of marginalized inhabitants, not all interpretive imputations of a given space are given the same level of consideration or resonate equally with policymakers and the public. Rather, frames are arrayed in a hierarchy of influence, with some invalidated by others. Thus, while Community Watch elected to vocally oppose the Safer Cities Initiative, the territorial stigma of Skid Row impinged on the ability to make these voices heard as credible. This ethnographic analysis provides a street-level view of the historical struggles documented in Chapter One, showing how struggles between LACAN and the LAPD represent a heated, sometimes violent fight over the “true” identity of the neighborhood.

### **Neighborhood Frames and the Development of Resistance**

I first met General Dogon on the morning of May 21, 2008, more than a year after I began conducting daily fieldwork in Skid Row. While I had heard occasional mention of LACAN and its civil rights organizing campaigns throughout my time studying the informal economy, it was not until I myself was unexpectedly detained and searched while standing on the sidewalk that I made the trip to the organization’s office, located in the ground floor of a residential hotel on the corner of Fifth and Main Streets. Several of the vendors had mentioned LACAN and I had come across the organization’s newspaper, the *Community Connection*. I

became interested in hearing the organization's take on the policing practices I had experienced first-hand. I sat in the lobby reading a book next to four other men seated on an array of couches until Dogon entered, greeting everyone by raising his fist in the air and exclaiming, "All power to the people!" He informed everyone in the room that he had just finished giving a heated testimony at a monthly LAPD Commission meeting. I instantly found Dogon impressive. In his fifties, he was muscular and walked with confidence. The tattoos on his neck, reading "Black Power" and "Caucazoid 187," were matched by those on his hands and arms. His dark, freshly picked hair jutted out from underneath a black beret loaded with small pins depicting outstretched fists and revolutionary slogans. He wore a red, black, and green medallion in the shape of the African continent around his neck, which swayed slightly with his confident gait.

I stood up and introduced myself, trying to quickly explain my research. Without hesitation, Dogon dove into a lengthy description of the organization and the Community Watch program. "You see, we're trying to do this like what the Black Panthers were doing back in the day. We gotta keep an eye on the pigs [police] and stop them from doing their pig shit." As he said this, Dogon smiled. He had noticed the copy of Bobby Seale's book, *Seize the Time* – an autobiography depicting the formation of the Black Panther Party – that I had just happened to grab as I left my house earlier that day. It was a fortuitous choice of reading material. Clearly enthused, Dogon brought me into his small cubicle office and shared photographs that he had taken at a recent Panther reunion event in northern California. We developed an instant connection.

Despite the immediate rapport, Dogon was uncompromising in his mandate that if I intended to research the organization's work, I was expected to contribute in any way that I could. I left the office that first day with the LACAN Community Watch manual tucked under

my arm. Over the next two weeks, I returned to the office every weekday for Community Watch training – consisting of a “know your rights” curriculum, military calisthenics, and role play exercises in which we practiced a variety of possible patrol scenarios. A month later, I donned a dark green shirt, military fatigues, and a clipboard to accompany the team on my first patrol. During this initial “probation period” I was confined to “General Support,” one of four assigned roles, in charge of writing down officers’ badge numbers, the names of witnesses, and a short description of any police interactions. Once I had a better grasp of the street names and landmarks of the entire neighborhood, Dogon allowed me to also fill the role of “Communications,” charged with notifying the office, or “Home Base,” of the team’s location via cell phone or walkie-talkie. A couple months later, I was also allowed to serve as “Videographer,” in charge of recording all interactions with officers. The fourth and final role of “Point Person” – the captain of the Community Watch team and the only individual allowed to make any verbal contact with officers – was exclusively performed by Dogon or another senior LACAN organizer.

Engaging in as many as three two-hour patrols per day, I spent a significant time getting to know Dogon. As we walked through the neighborhood, we had long conversations about his biography, which was strikingly similar to Steel’s (detailed in Chapter Three). Like Steel, Dogon grew up near the Pueblo del Rio housing project in South Central Los Angeles. A member of the Denver Lanes Bloods, Dogon began using and dealing crack cocaine as it washed over the city during the 1980s. He also began robbing banks. Following a number of short jail and prison sentences, Dogon was arrested following a botched stick-up in Burbank, California. Convicted on 18 counts of armed robbery, Dogon was incarcerated from 1991 to 2004. Similar to Steel, Dogon’s time behind bars was transformative. Whereas Steel escaped his gang affiliation by

devoting himself to the weight pile, Dogon exited gang life as a result of the mentorship he received from Hugo Pinell, a lieutenant in George Jackson's Black Guerilla Family – the institutionalized arm of Panthers. Serving a portion of his sentence in solitary confinement, Dogon devoured Hugo's "library" of books on Egyptian history and black nationalist thought, and later began teaching revolutionary black history to fellow inmates. He shed his legal name in favor of "General Dogon," which symbolized his intentions to begin a new life away from gangs, crime, and drugs.

Following their releases, neither Steel nor Dogon intended to return to their former neighborhoods in South Central and instead made their way to Skid Row. Yet, whereas Steel was reluctant to relocate to the neighborhood, worked hard to maintain a non-Skid Row identity, and quickly fled the area after police intervention, Dogon had quite the opposite reaction. He was enthusiastic to make Skid Row his new and permanent home, deeply embraced a Skid Row identity, and devoted himself to resistance upon experiencing police intervention. What accounts for these divergent orientations?

These differences cannot be explained by the men's contrasting political commitments alone. Rather, their disparate orientations are instead traced to the divergent neighborhood frames through which each of them perceived Skid Row and its current policing policies; to the different role that the neighborhood had held throughout each of their biographies. Recall that Steel, and most of the men at the weight pile, had mostly avoided travelling to Skid Row throughout their early lives. Dogon, on the other hand, reveled in the experience, often joking that he felt "at home" in Skid Row from the time he was conceived in one of the neighborhood's SRO hotels. His mother and father had met earlier that year while working at the Bullock's department store on Seventh and Broadway. Every day as a young boy, Dogon made the trip

from his mother's house in the Pueblos into downtown, where he spent time with his father and explored the city streets. "Pops would give me a couple dollars, or he would give me a bunch of free tickets to the theater," Dogon told me one Saturday evening as I recorded our conversation in a dark LACAN office. "I've always loved downtown since I was a kid. During the day, with all the businesses, you have all these people shopping, it was exciting. At night, when the stores close, all the ballrooms and nightclubs opened and the fancy lights would light up like Vegas. There was an energy, a whole style about it. If I went out at two in the morning in South Central it would be dead. Plus, in downtown there was always money to be made. I would always do little shit for money. When I was 12 years old, I got my very first job, working at a huge toy store over on San Pedro Street. My first job. That was a big deal for me!"

Throughout his early life, Dogon's viewed "downtown" and "Skid Row" as comprising a single neighborhood, through which he and his family moved with ease. It was this neighborhood – the neighborhood that entertained, employed, and sheltered Dogon – that he sought to return to after his lengthy incarceration. "This was my territory. This place was always a haven for me where I could lay low and get my shit together. After I pulled a robbery, or if somebody had a hit out for me, this is where I would come. If I needed to get a way for a bit, this is where I would come. When I got out, I knew this was the only place where I could address my addiction without going back to the old hood." After completing a recovery program at the now-defunct Salvation Army facility, Dogon moved into a subsidized room in a Skid Row Housing Trust building on Main Street. From this vantage point, he began noticing significant changes to the neighborhood he treasured. Most notable was what Dogon sometimes referred to as the growing "militarization" of Skid Row. "I look around and there's all these pigs and BIDs [Business Improvement District security guards] stopping people crossing the street, jacking



them up. When I used to spend time down here, they weren't down here at all. Now they're on every corner. It's like they're the biggest gang around.”

Consistently confronted by the conditions of this “new” Skid Row, Dogon found himself compelled to act. On a Sunday afternoon Dogon sat in his SRO hotel's common room watching football when he heard screams coming from just outside of his building. He rushed outside with several other residents to intervene as a BID security guard was twisting a woman's arm behind her back. The group of neighbors forced the guard to let go of her arm and back away.

Apparently the guard had grabbed the woman in order to confiscate what he assumed to be a crack pipe. Yet, when the woman opened her hand, it turned out that she had only been holding a small tube of eyeliner. The militarization had literally come to Dogon's doorstep. “Where the hell else is it ok to treat a random lady like that?” he exclaimed. “When I saw that, I knew this shit had gone too far. I knew right then I had to do something. I had learned all this powerful shit in prison, but when I got out I didn't know exactly what to do with it. What I knew after seeing the way this asshole treated this lady was that I needed to start patrolling these motherfuckers before that shit happens to more people around here. But the problem was I didn't know exactly what I could do.” Fortunately, when Dogon retold this story to a friend and former cellmate, they offered that he might take his idea to the organizers at LACAN. The next day he made the short walk to the office.

Since the LAPD redeployed 50 additional officers into Skid Row as part of the 2006 Safer Cities Initiative, LACAN has been its most vocal opponent. The organization was established in 1999 by two long-time community organizers – Becky Dennison and Pete White – who had grown dissatisfied with the dominant “social service” and “advocacy” models that characterized a vast majority of Skid Row organizations. For the co-founders, such organizations

had a long and problematic history of making decisions and advocating on behalf of area inhabitants without seeking input or participation from the very individuals they purported to be assisting. Rather than advocate on behalf of Skid Row inhabitants, LACAN strives to teach those in Skid Row how to advocate for themselves and each other. Developing a resident-driven organizing model, the organization began working on issues surrounding civil rights, housing, health, food access, and gender equity. LACAN has grown significantly since its founding. It now reports a 700 member roster and a nine-member board of directors, made up almost exclusively of individuals residing within Skid Row's boundaries. The organization employs four full-time and one part-time staff organizers, as well as two interns, all of whom are also Skid Row residents. Mirroring the demographic characteristics of the larger neighborhood, roughly 70% of LACAN members are African-American and three-quarters live in one of the nearby SRO hotels. Like many in Skid Row, a number of those involved with the organization experienced intermittent periods of homelessness, incarceration, and addiction throughout the duration of my fieldwork.

Dogon felt an instant connection with the organization and spent several hours speaking with staff, even returning the following day. "I basically went in there and told them what I had been seeing. I was like, 'What can we do?' They gave me a disposable camera and a clipboard and told me to take some pictures and take down names. Then they told me to go out and grab some other people that feel the same way I do. So I was like, 'Cool, this is a job for me.' I was like, 'Hell yeah.' So I started doing that and I started volunteering in the office." Over the next few months, Dogon and LACAN organizers made several trips to the downtown law library to determine exactly what kinds of responses were available, including the possibility of legal action. Dogon assembled a small constituency to join in as he documented abusive behavior, and

the group began to piece together a training manual. On November 4, 2005, at a press conference staged on the doorsteps of the Downtown Historic Core BID offices, LACAN announced the official launch of its Community Watch Program. Following the formal launch of the program, Dogon devoted his waking hours to developing and leading Community Watch and, a year later, he was promoted to the position of full-time staff organizer.

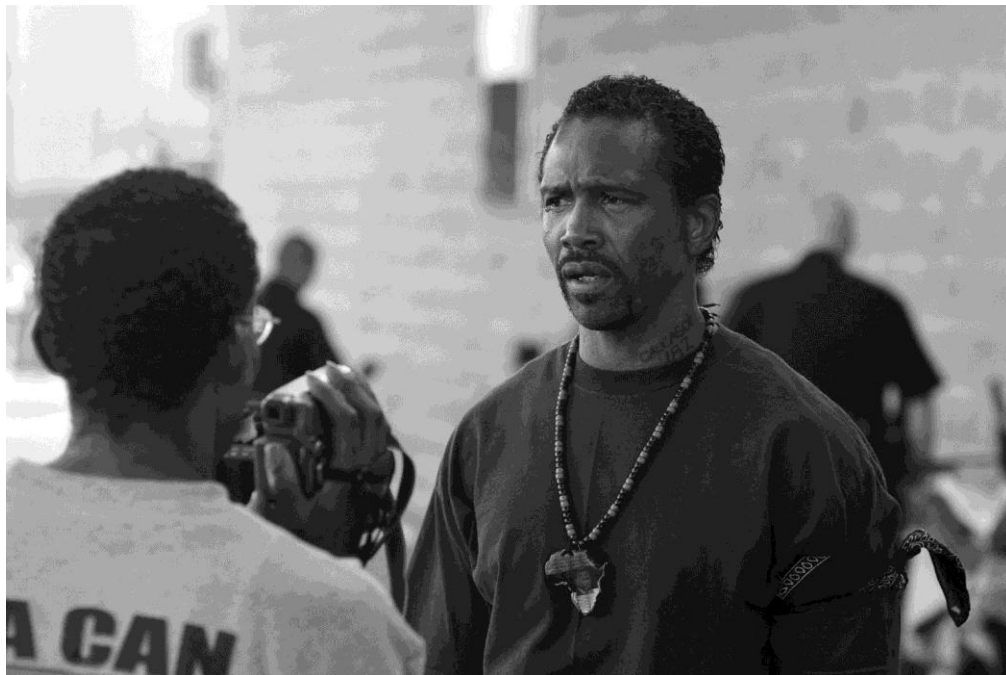


Figure 23. General Dogon patrolling on Community Watch. Photo: Nicholas Dahmann.

*“Skid Row Is a ‘Real’ Community”*

It is important to highlight that not all of the individuals who became LACAN members and joined the Community Watch team shared in Dogon’s black militant ideology. In fact, Dogon is by far the most radical among an organizational constituency that spans a broad ideological spectrum. What all of these individuals did share, however, is a neighborhood frame

of Skid Row as a viable and “real” community. As with Dogon, this frame originated in “moments of community,” in which the “true” character of the Skid Row neighborhood was revealed as the result of key biographical junctures. Most frequently, these moments involved the realization that those in Skid Row were quite like themselves.

Al, an elderly white male and rabid Lakers fan, informed me once that he had always assumed the worst about Skid Row and its population until he found himself homeless in 2000. A year prior, Al had fallen into an unexpected coma. “I woke up to a disaster,” Al recounted as we sat chatting in the LACAN lobby. By the time he had come out of his coma Al’s health had significantly deteriorated, and his insurance had been maxed out. As a result, he lost his home. His wife had become suicidal and the state had taken away his children. Lacking other options, he made his way to Skid Row and began sleeping in Pershing Square Park. “Something really crazy happened while I was down here. All the people in the park, who had been there and knew the area, all these people that I used to look down on, they became my best friends. And they looked after me. They told me where and when to sleep and helped me get food. I realized that these are good people, just like me. They didn’t deserve to have the police coming and clearing them out of the park all the time.” Once his social security payments kicked in and Al was able to secure a room in a nearby SRO hotel, he followed the advice of several of his neighbors and joined LACAN in an effort to better stem the tide of criminalization he perceived to be negatively affecting his newfound friends.

For Pete White, one particular moment of community was a central impetus for the founding of LACAN. Two months after I began my research on Community Watch, Pete joined Dogon and me on a quick walk through the neighborhood. As we passed the corner of Fifth and Crocker, Pete pointed to a building across the street and described the shooting of his cousin.

Pete explained this event as a central motivation for his current organizing work. “Way back, my cousin was shot down right there. He and a friend were coming out of the treatment center and two guys rolled up to rob them. They tried to defend themselves. One of them shot my cousin a few times. The man ran off, and he turned this corner right here. What happened next was that a bunch of members of the community chased this guy down. He had a gun and they chased him and they caught him. They jumped on him and held him down until the police came. I think that really shows what I’m always talking about. This community was looking out for him. The city and the LAPD always wants to argue that there is no community down here. But, in reality, all you have to do is come down here and if they actually got out of their squad cars and talked to people, they’d see there is a strong community. I see it all the time.”

Given the group behaviors detailed in Chapter Four, it may initially appear as if Steel and his crew experienced similar moments of community. It is important to recognize that the men perceived their acts of solidarity as occurring *in spite of* the typical behaviors and conditions they believed to characterize neighborhood. LACAN members, on the other hand, saw these moments as a defining characteristic of the community. They argued that Skid Row and its population had been unjustly saddled with negative and derogatory stereotypes. “They look at Skid Row like it’s the pits of hell,” Dogon complained once. “They can’t see anything good coming from out of here, just all negative. They think everybody is on parole or probation, that everybody is a dope fiend.” LACAN members and staff consistently argued that this popular image was largely the result of the recent economic development near Skid Row, what they referred to cynically as the “downtown renaissance.” As Dogon advanced on an almost daily basis, the city was determined to make the area into “Times Square West.” With the introduction of lofts, art galleries, and increased affluence, he informed me, “white yuppies” had begun to view Skid Row as a serious

problem, and devised ways to clear away a predominantly African-American population that frightened them. Fearing assaults and harassment as they walked their dogs throughout the downtown streets, these “gentrifiers” called upon the police to profile poor and African-American inhabitants for immediate arrest and incarceration. “They treat their damn poodles better than they treat us,” Dogon would sometimes say when we passed a chic pet boutique near the LACAN office on Main Street.

It was a taken-for-granted position among those affiliated with LACAN that Skid Row’s negative stereotypes existed in a cyclical, mutually-reinforcing relationship with policing. A widely-held belief that Skid Row was populated by a mass of “dope fiends” led to the criminalization of even the most mundane behaviors. This criminalization in turn confirmed and reinforced the exact stereotypes on which police measures were founded. Dogon expressed this relationship as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. “Do you know why people use drugs and alcohol in the first place?” he questioned me on an evening patrol. “It’s because they’re bored. And they’re depressed. They don’t have any jobs so they just have to sit around, or they end up homeless. But they can’t get those jobs because of all these bullshit arrests! That kind of shit holds us back. How is anybody supposed to survive with all these pigs jacking everyone up? How are you supposed to get a job now that you got a criminal record? They come through and arrest everybody for stupid little shit, then they just say ‘Look! They really are a bunch of criminals. Just a bunch of animals!’”

In short, rather than accept the popular image of anarchic jungle, LACAN members framed Skid Row as a legitimate neighborhood like any other that, despite its relatively high levels of drug addiction, mental illness, and homelessness, contained a close knit community of friends and neighbors who cared deeply for, and came to the assistance of, one another. Given

inhabitants' extremely low incomes, education levels, and often-tumultuous biographies, the neighborhood's saturation of low-cost housing and vital social services made it one of the sole locations in the region that they felt they could ever truly call home. Yet, as they further indicated, the possibility of leading stable lives had become threatened with the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative and its related policies, which served to compound many of the conditions most responsible for stigma and social exclusion.

### **Fighting Stigma and Criminalization through Community Watch Patrols**

As part of the organization's larger effort to combat and supplant Skid Row's negative popular image with their own visions of the neighborhood, the Community Watch program took the criminalization of neighborhood as its primary target. In this, the program and its patrols were designed to accomplish two broad goals. First and foremost, Community Watch aimed to significantly reduce harmful police interventions. Ideally, through the team's presence and surveillance, officers would begin to reconsider any unwarranted stops, harassment, or abuse that they otherwise readily perpetrated. Second, in order to more effectively hold the LAPD accountable for mistreatment, Community Watch was designed as tool for overcoming the dilemmas the organization faced in producing credible proof of their claims. In their early organizing campaigns, many of the organization's contentions about police mistreatment and unjustified criminalization fell on deaf ears or were met with skepticism. As co-founder Becky Dennison relayed to me early in my fieldwork, "Flat out, people just didn't believe us when we said this stuff was going on. A lot of our decision to start documenting it, especially to start using video had to do with the fact that a lot of people accused us of lying about the conditions and the

treatment down here.” Dogon expressed a similar complaint, highlighting a dual impediment faced by those in the neighborhood. “You got all these people down here yelling and screaming about what the LAPD is doing to them. But these phonies up in city hall just look at us like, ‘Oh, what’s that? You’re black? *And* you’re from Skid Row? Get the hell out of here you bunch of crack head bums!’”

For scholars writing on the factors impacting credibility (see Cooney 1994), this dilemma comes as no surprise. Comprised of homeless and extremely impoverished residents, LACAN membership is handicapped (oftentimes quite outwardly) by very low status characteristics and assumptions about deviant “lifestyle choices.” Unemployment, marginal levels of education, limited public speaking experience, and the occasional criminal record overlay physical signs of poor health to cast doubt on members’ contentions. The very act of appearing during “normal working hours” to make public comments in city council, for instance, not only produced skepticism regarding the organization’s claims, but opened members to ridicule that if they were more interested in finding a job, many of their problems would be solved.

In order to better attain their goals, Community Watch developed two distinct and sophisticated patrol tactics. First, given their goal of impeding unwarranted police stops *before* they occurred, Community Watch devoted a considerable amount of energy to developing and deploying a folk sociology of policing that allowed them to *better anticipate when and where officers were likely to make contact with residents*. Unlike the street vendors on Fifth Street who attempted to “see like a cop” to better regulate residents’ “problematic” behaviors on the corner, Community Watch developed folk theories of policing in order to more fully capture what they perceived as the arbitrary and unyielding nature of police detainments, citations, and arrests. By anticipating officer interventions, patrols were positioned to capture important contextual factors



– the precipitating events, the exact cause of the exchange, and the regularity of officer behavior  
– that could prove that officers lacked the requisite probable cause for their actions. It was virtually impossible to make this claim if the team arrived on the scene once officers had already begun their interrogation.

This dilemma was brought home in the summer of 2007 in an unsuccessful attempt to use footage to support the organization’s claims. One morning, LACAN members recorded several officers punching and kicking an unarmed elderly man, named Joe Nelson, in the process of detainment and arrest. Rendered unconscious by multiple blows, Nelson was removed from the scene in an ambulance. Preparing the footage for use in Nelson’s criminal trial, those in the organization viewed it as obvious and clear-cut evidence of the police brutality that had become standard under the Safer Cities Initiative. Yet, without the ability to record the relevant contextual factors, the question of whether or not there was an abuse of power was highly contested by the officers involved. In court, the arresting officers provided their own narration of the incident. They contended that Nelson willingly invited the officers to converse with him, at which time he flipped into a psychotic episode, pulled out several pieces of crack cocaine, and began throwing them into his mouth. The officers argued that their use of force was intended to dislodge the narcotics from Nelson’s mouth in order to ensure his safety, as well as guarantee the preservation of physical evidence. Ultimately, the officers accounts were believed over those of eye-witnesses, LACAN, and Nelson himself.

The second tactic developed on Community Watch patrols was to *generate video footage in which officer statements and behaviors served to, in a sense, “vouch” for LACAN’s claims.* Doing so, team members reasoned that they could become more effective in overcoming their own deficiencies in credibility. In contrast to the Nelson video, this kind of footage had the

capacity to reposition officers as “virtual expert witnesses” that spoke on behalf of the organization to pin down a contemporaneous narration of the events in question. It further provided the opportunity for the organization to argue the causal links between officers’ perceptions of the neighborhood and their damaging treatment of its residents.

### *Patrol Tactics I: Anticipating Police Interventions*

Despite the unrivaled saturation of officers within the 50 square blocks of Skid Row, the four-member Community Watch teams, travelling the neighborhood on foot, had significant difficulty capturing many police incidents from start to finish. As a result, the vast majority of recordings did not begin until well after an officer had already approached a suspect and placed him or her in handcuffs. For Community Watch leadership, their inability to account for precipitating events posed a serious dilemma, weakening the credibility of future claims. Beginning in the fall months of 2008, however, Pete and Dogon began implementing a strategy for generating far more comprehensive footage. They determined that patrols should devote additional energy to discerning officers’ tendencies, patterns, and “favorite targets.” As Pete insisted during a particularly uneventful patrol, “We’re out here fishing, but the question is, do we really have the right bait?” Becoming more conscious of attractive “bait” allowed Community Watch to be more proactive in anticipating what conditions and behaviors most readily resulted in police intervention. With this knowledge, Community Watch made efforts to “read” the Skid Row landscape and restructure patrols toward certain locations.

On an early afternoon in late September of 2008, I joined Dogon on Community Watch. We made our usual route from the office, which took us east on Sixth Street to San Julian. “Ah

shit,” Dogon sighed as he surveyed the street scene from the corner. “Look at the block. It’s empty. I bet the pigs just came through and cleared everyone out. We probably just missed them not five minutes ago.” “Let’s head up over to Gladys Park,” another team member named Debbie offered, but Dogon was already walking quickly in that direction. “Come on ya’ll. We have to be quick. I know exactly where they’re headed. When people get cleared off the block over here, they all move over there. The pigs are probably headed up there right now, so they can chase them from one side of Skid Row to the other.” We walked quickly, continuing eastward on Sixth. As he crossed an intersection, Dogon suddenly jumped out of the crosswalk, avoiding a large mound of horse droppings. “Looks like they got the horse cops out here today,” Dogon called out as he turned to the rest of us. “It looks fresh too, so that means we’re right behind them. Come on!” Dogon picked up his pace. On other patrols, I observed the team literally “track” mounted officers by following a trail of fresh droppings until they reached the officers responsible – a practice Dogon once referred to as “pig hunting.” On this particular day, the droppings appeared to be leading to the same location Dogon was already heading. However, the droppings suddenly disappeared after two more blocks.

Dogon came to an abrupt stop when we approached the corner of Sixth and Stanford Streets and made a motion for the rest of us to huddle together in the shade of a building. “Hold up, hold up,” he said in a quiet voice, peering around the building to count the number of people standing along the sidewalk on Stanford. “Oh yeah, there’s a lot of people on this street. So that means we beat the pigs down here. But they should be here any minute. This looks like a place where the jump-outs [undercover narcotics officers] would be at.” We stood for five minutes looking up and down the nearby streets until Dogon began to grow impatient, questioning his initial analysis of the street scene. “Shit, I don’t see any jump-outs around. You know, it’s almost

too quiet. It's like they're staging a big bust right here. I bet they got the undercovers in there buying, and they have the chase cars waiting around the corner, listening on the radio to come crashing in. We need somebody to go in there and see if they spot any undercovers." Dogon integrated his knowledge of Central Division's "buy/but stings" into Community Watch orientation. While he was not privy to officer trainings or strategies devised during officer roll call, Dogon had learned, through careful observation, that undercover officers approached groups of individuals looking for narcotics. When a deal is made, they radio to "chase cars" – squad cars containing four uniformed officers – to speed in to make the arrest. Surveying the scene on Stanford, he believed this process to already be underway.

The group quickly deliberated and selected Dogon as the team member most likely to blend into the crowd that had formed on the sidewalk. Dogon's appearance was assisted by the green shirts and black pants that were required as part of the Community Watch uniform. According to Pete, the decision to outfit Community Watch with green shirts was intentional, as it is one of the only colors not worn by local agents social control. Indeed, LAPD officers wear black or blue, LA County Sheriff deputies wore brown, and the various BID security guards wear purple (Historic Core BID), red (Central City East Association), and blue (Arts District). While green is worn by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, they are hardly present in the neighborhood, and are seen as little threat to the predominantly African-American population. While these colors evoke hesitation and fear from some in Skid Row, the Community Watch uniform was designed to put residents at ease by separating Community Watch activities from law enforcement.

As he began to cross the street, Dogon called out to the group. "Walk down to the other corner and see if you see any jump-outs waiting in the cut [hiding]." The group followed his

orders and fanned out. By this date I, along with all the team members had become skilled at spotting undercover officers. Throughout the summer, Community Watch had compiled a thick booklet containing pictures of Central Division's numerous unmarked cars and their respective license plates. This was accompanied by photos of undercover officers with short descriptions of their typical attire and the relative levels of hostility they held toward Community Watch. The book was constantly updated as new cars were added to the fleet or new officers joined the narcotics enforcement team.

The team arrived back at the original position as Dogon returned. No one reported seeing any uniformed or undercover agents at all. "They're definitely serving [dealing drugs] over there," Dogon informed us. "This is what we really need. We need to get the pigs on tape walking up to addicts and trying to get them to buy. We gotta get that shit on tape." The group huddled close to the building once more, in an attempt to remain hidden in the event that officers arrived on the scene. As we waited, Debbie, herself a recovered addict conveyed the importance of getting a sting operation on video. "You see all these people, they're so caught up in their disease that they won't even realize when it's a police officer standing right next to them. The police are spending all this money on busting all these people, but where is the money for the housing and the recovery programs that we *really* need down here? Putting us in jail, that's not going to solve anything. Every community has problems, and the police shouldn't be the ones who are creating those problems or making them worse." Yet, after a long fifteen minutes of closely watching pedestrians and peeking around corners, there was still no sign of police activity. Without discussion, Dogon instructed us to abandon our "stake-out" so as not to miss out on the police activity surely unfolding in other parts of the neighborhood.

The team exploited their knowledge of Central Division's policing logistics in several other ways. One effective method entailed scheduling Community Watch during particularly "hot" periods. In late 2008, for instance, LACAN organizers began noticing that there seemed to be an increase in narcotics stings on Tuesday evenings. In response, the organization began "vice night" patrols. Team members also drew on their knowledge as neighborhood residents to anticipate when the team was likely to encounter a large number of documentable arrests. Like the Fifth Street vendors who recognized the increase in money and drug activity in the neighborhood during the first ten days of the month, when welfare checks were distributed, LACAN increased the number of its patrols during this time anticipating that Central Division would likely increase the number of officers on the street. At one point, Dogon designed "reverse stings" to exploit officers' lowered threshold for detainment and interrogation during this time of the month. According to his plan, one team member would don a dark hooded sweatshirt and a concealed audio recorder and stand outside of an SRO building. Meanwhile, the other team members would hide nearby, prepared to record officers making contact with the "mark" without probable cause. These sting operations did not materialize, however, largely because of the legal difficulties they were likely to produce.

### *Patrol Tactics II: "Catching them Slipping"*

When the Community Watch team encountered officers and set their cameras to record, they utilized a strategic orientation to filming, referred to by Dogon and others as "catching officers slipping." On the most basic level, to catch someone slipping means confusing them, or tripping them up in hesitation, such that they act in a manner which is no longer in their best

interest. Ironically, though LACAN uses this strategy against the police, it is actually a technique borrowed from the interrogation strategies applied by officers in Skid Row. According to this technique, officers approach individuals in Skid Row and ask them multiple biographical questions – about criminal histories, past drug use, or parole violations – in order to catch them in a discontinuity. If the officers are successful, suspects give up self-incriminating information which can be used as grounds for their arrest or prolonged detainment.

Assigned to the General Support role throughout the majority of my fieldwork on Community Watch, I was able to record detailed field notes on police interactions as they occurred, in real time. Collecting such precise data allowed for a close examination of the micro-interactional techniques the Community Watch team utilized to catch officers slipping. I supplemented many of these notes with recordings that I made with my own video camera, capturing the behavior of all parties involved.



Figure 24. “Catching Officers Slipping.” Photo: Nicholas Dahmann.

Observing these interactions, I discovered that Dogon and other organizers who fulfilled the Point Person role had developed a distinct conversational method that not only drew officers into exchanges on the organization’s terms, but also created multiple opportunities for officers to incriminate themselves. A prime example came in 2008, as the Community Watch team began collecting evidence of LAPD noncompliance with a recent court order. Several months earlier, largely as a result of legal pressure brought by LACAN and the American Civil Liberties Union, a federal court restricted officer behavior in Skid Row under the Fitzgerald Injunction. According to the injunction, officers were prohibited from handcuffing and searching individuals cited for jay-walking and other minor offenses. The court also mandated division-wide training and oversight. After several months, however, LACAN felt it necessary to begin collecting



footage for a return to federal court. In the following excerpt from field notes, I documented Dogon's attempt to catch two mounted officers slipping:

As the officers were remounting, Dogon called out to them, "Hey, can I ask you a question?" The officers turned their horses to face Dogon. They nodded their heads. Dogon continued, "Now, don't you know it's illegal to search for minor offenses and ask people if they are on probation or parole?" The officers looked at him for a second and did not say anything. Dogon continued with questions, "Haven't you ever heard of the Fitzgerald Injunction?" The officers continued to stare. They did not seem to have an answer ready. They finally shook their heads, lifting their eyebrows as though waiting for Dogon to continue with more information. Dogon laughed a bit, in a sarcastic manner. "Your sergeant has never told you about the Fitzgerald injunction?" One of the officers simply said, "Nope." Dogon asked the question again, and they both individually repeated the answer, "Naw...nope." The officers turned to leave. Dogon called out to them, "Yeah, that's what I thought! You guys are supposed to know the law of what you can and can't do out here!" After he said this, Dogon turned to me and commented, "Man, these guys don't even know what the hell the law is. That's a problem. They are supposed to be trained and briefed on this stuff! Obviously they're not. And we got them on tape saying that stuff too."

In this interaction, Dogon invited the officers into an interactional space that carried elevated stakes similar to a cross-examination (Adelswärd et al. 1987; Van Dijk 1989), controlling

information yield through a sequence regulating appropriate responses (Harris 1984). First, Dogon called out to the officer in an innocent and non-confrontational manner, quite similar to that of a community resident requesting help or directions. However, the initiating question was designed to do more than simply grab the officers' attention. If the officers accepted the initial request, they opened the door for a more intrusive or controversial second question, and made their answers to that question all the more necessary. They were compelled at a higher standard to answer later questions if they gave Dogon permission to ask it. By prefacing his more damning inquiry with an innocuous one, Dogon also reduced the possibility that the officers could simply ignore the question regarding the Fitzgerald Injunction after hearing its accusatory nature. If the officers departed the interaction without answering the Fitzgerald question, or if they outright denied the initiating question, Dogon could attest to demonstrating an instance of LAPD disrespect of the community and its representative organizations. Such an image would run counter to the supposed role of "officer-as-community-liaison" that is often advanced in the Safer Cities Initiative. Second, through his repeated, though varied questioning, Dogon introduced a powerful reason why the officers struggled to recall knowledge on the injunction – they had not received any formal briefings or trainings from their superior officers. With this information captured on tape, LACAN had thus generated testimony from inside the department to support their claim that the LAPD had willfully disregarded the training orders. Returning to the LACAN office, several members of the Watch team indicated that this footage was ideal in that officers could no longer deny that they were handcuffing and searching residents in violation of the injunction.

Using footage to reposition LAPD officers as expert witnesses for the organization, LACAN exploited the professional authority that followed the police from the streets into other

sites of contestation, like the courtroom. According to LACAN, the officers patrolling Skid Row had grown arrogant with the power conveyed by their badges. Despite the hundreds of complaints LACAN had helped community residents file, none had resulted in discipline. Well aware that courts overwhelmingly sided with the LAPD over the homeless and impoverished of Skid Row, officers seldom censored their insults, boasting, or admissions of dominance. Strategies to catch officers slipping were designed to bring out this complacency and capture it on tape to substantiate the organization's claims. As a result, police reactions did not need to be hostile to be beneficial for constructing footage. In the following field note excerpt, the Community Watch patrol encountered two officers involved in the Nelson video as they provided security for several bulldozers clearing tents and shopping carts from the sidewalks:

As we walked closer, Dogon exclaimed, "Oh look, there are two of the guys that beat up the dude on San Julian! Let's see if we can catch them slipping." We stood next to the squad car and watched the bulldozer for a minute. Upon seeing the group, one of the officers came over to our location with a smile on his face. Steve pointed the camera at him. "Hey!" Dogon called out. The officer nodded his head upward in acknowledgement, "Yeah?" Dogon continued, "I was wondering... You know that guy you and your partner beat up on San Julian? You remember that guy you jacked up real bad? What's his name?" The officer continued smiling and responded instantly. He had his thumbs in the front of his pants near his belt buckle. He jutted his chest out, rocking on his heels. "Oh, that guy? Yeah. Joe Nelson. His name was Nelson." The officer's partner stood behind him, nodding in agreement. Dogon continued, "And what were you guys

arresting him for? Why'd you jack him up like that?" He quickly offered up this information as well, "Narcotics...*not* sunflower seeds." We had him repeat the name, spelling it aloud, N-E-L-S-O-N. Dogon thanked him, and we walked on.

The way in which Dogon worded his questioning was critical to soliciting beneficial reactions from the officer. After moving from an initiating question to create the conversational space, Dogon asked, "You remember that guy you beat up?" The linguistic subtlety of the question is important. The phrasing of the inquiry structured the question as only indirectly concerned with whether or not the officer actually beat the man. What the question directly asks is whether he even remembers the incident at all. Phrasing the question in this manner had the effect of corralling the officer in his answer. An answer in the affirmative, that he remembers the incident, can also be construed as an admission that the officer did in fact "beat" the man. Asking the question in this way limited his ability to offer an alternative explanation for his actions during the incident in question. This is further compounded because Dogon had structured the question in two parts – first, whether the officer remembered beating the man, and second, whether he remembered the man's name. The short, affirmative "Yeah" response, said through a smile and air of comfort, could simply be an answer to the latter. However, without clarifying which question the officer is addressing, it stands as an affirmative to both. He did not mobilize a clarification. Dogon immediately added a follow-up question, "Why did you jack him up like that?" The officer was quick to offer damning information about Nelson – that he was being arrested for narcotics. Dogon's conversational techniques not only served to further implicate the officer in willfully and intentionally beating the man, but also propelled the officer deeper into

the interactional space without allowing him the ability to retreat in the conversation to contest the notion that he beat the man.

This tactic was thus vital in the organization's efforts to demonstrate the detrimental effects that Skid Row's popular image and the resulting policing policies was having on their lives. Community Watch aimed to induce officers to articulate their devaluing perceptions about the neighborhood, and then link these statements to the violence and mistreatment the team recorded. Dogon's questioning should also be seen as a technique to capture previously undocumented context. As noted in the earlier discussion of the Nelson video, without footage of the events precipitating the use of force, LACAN failed to supplant officers' in-court statements that the interaction with Nelson was consensual and nonviolent until Nelson became unruly. Although the officer did not admit to an intentional misapplication of force in the new footage, LACAN believed that his statements had the potential to cast at least some doubt on his narrative. Thus, by showing him smiling and joking while describing Nelson's treatment, the organization not only created scenes that alluded to a pattern of conduct among Skid Row officers propelled by a disrespect of the neighborhood and its supposed lack of community, but also filled gaps in other pieces of footage.

Just as their neighborhood frame propelled LACAN members to engage in practices of resistance, these practices in turn reinforced a dedication to, and salience of, this particular way of thinking about the neighborhood. For those engaged in daily Community Watch patrols, this neighborhood frame was consistently confirmed in ways that they were not for others living in Skid Row – like those in Steel's crew or those vending along Fifth Street. Through their efforts to shield their friends and neighbors from unwanted police contact, the Community Watch team actualized a Skid Row that was characterized by high levels of collective solidarity. By spending

a significant portion of their days seeking out and fixating on what they perceived as unjustified police interventions, team members found ready occasion to confirm their contentions regarding the pervasive and injurious nature of detainments, arrests, and citations. In short, by believing in and acting on this frame, it became real in its consequences.

### *Police Counter Strategies*

Over time, however, officers encountering Community Watch on a daily basis caught on to the organization's attempts to deter police intervention and generate incriminating footage. In response, officers evoked a number of counter strategies, ranging from direct and overt to more subtle means of disruption. Officers' counterstrategies provide a lens for observing how the contradictory neighborhood frames held by LACAN and Central Division officers materialized and competed with one other on the streets of Skid Row. While those involved with Community Watch viewed their efforts as actualizing their neighborhood frame by protecting their friends and neighbors from unwanted and detrimental police contact, officers came to view these same empirical actions and events as just one more set of problematic behaviors taken up by members of a population unwilling to alter their problematic lifestyles; Community Watch was further proof of pathology. Officers' responses were in turn read by Community Watch members as a confirmation of their standing contentions, ultimately leading to a mutual escalation and fortification of oppositions.

### Intimidation and Avoidance

As the most overt of the various counter strategies, officers began blatantly arresting members of the Community Watch team, removing the clipboards and cameras from their hands and putting them into handcuffs. During my fieldwork, Dogon, Pete, and Debbie were each arrested while on patrol. Officers contended that they were unlawfully interfering in police investigations. Given the ambiguous nature of what exactly counts as “interfering,” the team’s interactions with officers were marked by incredible tension that I too felt from my first patrol. Walking this thin line every time on patrol, team members explicitly recognized that a day that began on Community Watch could very easily end in a jail cell. But this tension was not always alleviated once members hung up their cameras and headed home. Officers also began detaining and arresting members of Community Watch while they travelled throughout the neighborhood for other, more mundane purposes. Dogon and two other men that were highly involved with LACAN were arrested while driving through the neighborhood. While the police report stated that the men were believed to fit the description of well-known drug dealers, and were engaged in behaviors that were indicative of drug sales, officer testimony in later court proceedings strongly suggests that officers were aware of the men’s organizational affiliation.

Most often, however, intimidation tactics took a far more covert and disguised form. One common tactic was to “remind” those on Community Watch that officers had personal knowledge of their criminal records, histories of addiction, place of residence, and other intimate biographical details. For example, for the duration of an entire month following one of Dogon’s arrests, officers reversed their typical behavior by actively approaching the team while out on patrol. When they approached, they addressed Dogon by his legal name, which he had dropped while incarcerated, and loudly publicized various details about his arrest and pending trial. While some team members took pride in rumors that their pictures and profiles hung prominently in the

halls of Central Division, I observed three different LACAN members opt out of participating on Community Watch team due to fear of retaliation by angered officers.

Officers also employed strategies of avoidance by incorporating the movements of the Community Watch team into their own patrol practices, thereby exploiting the mobility provided by their squad cars to ensure that Community Watch would not be able to document incidents. Aware that Dogon and his team followed the sight of squad cars throughout the neighborhood, these officers would often remain parked along the sidewalk until the team approached. As soon as the team arrived at their position, the officers would quickly speed away to make a detainment several blocks away, often concluded by the time the team was able to catch up to them. “You’re too slow,” I recorded these officers telling Dogon on multiple occasions. After an hour of chasing two officers from one side of the neighborhood to the other, they pulled their squad car next to us, and the driver called out in a sarcastic tone, “Why don’t you guys just get in the car with us? You’ll get some better shots!” With this, they took off up the street and cuffed a man as he jay-walked. Community Watch considered a number of strategies for overcoming these disparities in mobility, including using bicycles and cars during their patrols. However, none of these were adopted throughout the duration of my fieldwork. These modes of transportation would have ultimately opened the team to the possibility of citations, giving officers further means of hindering movement through the neighborhood.

Those involved in Community Watch activities held conflicting views about officers’ attempts to intimidate and avoid. On the one hand, team members perceived these responses as clear proof that Community Watch patrols were being taken seriously. The patrols were preventing or reducing at least some of the unwarranted interventions that would have otherwise harmed neighborhood residents. On the other hand, however, as officers became more efficient



in deflecting or avoiding Community Watch's attempts to record them, it meant that the team returned to the office with less "quality" footage that it could use to support its claims. "Quiet" patrols were thus bittersweet for Dogon and his team.

### Contaminating Footage

In the event that officers were unable to altogether elude the team, officers took steps to problematize the information that LACAN was able to capture on film. These strategies served to reclaim the perceptive field, bring attention back to the micro-moment at hand, and introduce rival contextual factors that overwhelmed the information LACAN was attempting to capture. In doing so, officers were able to render even the "best" footage unusable. The struggle over the most accurate neighborhood frame thus manifested in the struggle to control the images portrayed on video. Of course, Community Watch was not powerless in these instances, and in turn developed what Goffman (1959) referred to as "realignment strategies" to symbolically reclaim these images for their desired purposes.

In the following excerpt from my field notes, the Community Watch team approached two mounted officers during a narcotics arrest. As the arrest concluded, Dogon addressed one of the officers in an effort to graft larger contextual concerns onto the footage:

Dogon called out to the closest officer, and pointed his finger at the horse droppings on the sidewalk underneath the horse's back legs. "So officer, you gonna clean up the crap or what?" After a short pause, he dismounted his horse and used the inside of his boot to sweep the large pile of horse droppings across

the sidewalk and into the gutter. He made several passes, moving piles closer and closer to the street. As he was doing this, he stopped, turned to Dogon and said, “See, you’re trying to get me to say something inappropriate on camera. You’re not gonna catch me saying anything inappropriate on camera.” Dogon remained silent. After two passes from his horse to the gutter, the officer stood still, and stated loudly to his partner who was only about four feet away from him. “You see that jailhouse tattoo he’s got? You like that? It says ‘death to whitey.’” His partner did not respond. After all of the horse droppings had been kicked into the gutter, the officer mounted his horse. Once he was on top, Dogon called up to him with a smile, in a calm tone, “Thanks for keeping my community clean.” It was not clear if the officer heard him as he called loudly, “What!?” in a hostile tone. Dogon took a second, and in a quieter voice, said “Thanks for keeping my community clean.” The officer glared at Dogon, and the two walked their horses the other way on Seventh Street.

Dogon once again aimed to catch the mounted officer slipping by making a request that was likely to produce either outright dismissal or a hostile reaction. Further, Dogon attempted to create, in this single instance, a more general representation of officers’ disrespect toward the community and responsibility for negative stereotypes by reconstructing the moment in which officers decided whether or not they would clean up after their horses. LACAN had long argued that if the police were truly deployed to help “clean up” Skid Row, they would be more diligent about the massive amount of droppings left by LAPD horses on the sidewalks. Thus, rather than improve the quality of life, policing was responsible for *creating* the neighborhood’s filth.

Despite strategies to produce incriminating images, the officer contested Dogon's attempts to garner evidence. Instead of responding in a hostile manner, the officer dismounted and began sweeping the droppings into the gutter. Once engaged in the interactional space, he carried out several actions that undermined Dogon's ability to inject supplementary information onto the tape. The officer turned directly to the camera and stated several times, "You're not going to catch me saying anything inappropriate on camera." In doing so, he introduced new contextual information for potential viewers. In appearing familiar with Dogon and the cameras, he offered an alternative explanation of Dogon's request. It did not stem from an effort to keep the sidewalks clean, but was a conscious tactic to provoke officers into inappropriately and *uncharacteristically* lashing out at the Community Watch team.

The officer's subtle reference to professional conduct does more than simply demonstrate his adherence to it. As he continues to sweep, the officer reversed scrutiny back onto the Community watch team, supplanting contextual information and reminding viewers of the differential authority and status existing between the two parties. Speaking to his partner in a loud voice, the officer highlighted Dogon's prison tattoos. In doing so, he infused the footage with a comparison between himself as an LAPD officer, and Dogon as an ex-convict. Emphasizing Dogon's tattoos also provided the opportunity to cast additional doubt on Dogon's underlying intentions for beginning the interaction with the officer. Emphasizing that Dogon has "death to whitey" tattooed on his neck implied that Dogon's actions may have more accurately been propelled by racist intentions. Rather than taking steps to keep the community clean, Dogon may have simply been attempting to humiliate white officers out of personal hatred. Similar to Scheppele's (1992) discussion of the "invisible" impediments faced by women accusing former employers of sexual harassment, Dogon is recast as the aggressor as attention is shifted away

from the conduct of the police. The officer's reframing implied that the antagonisms only arose upon Dogon's interruption into the scene. This narrative also cut deep into a fundamental LACAN claim that the organization was acting on behalf of the residents in the neighborhood. If officers could undermine Community Watch by symbolically separating LACAN from the community, any footage capturing officer hostility toward organization staff might lose its ability to represent general officer treatment of residents. Dogon's response reflected an attempt to wrestle control of the footage back from the officer. By stating "Thanks for keeping my community clean," Dogon thanks the officer *on behalf* of the residents, in an effort to deflect the officer's attempt to separate him from Skid Row. His tone of voice and demeanor are important. By remaining friendly, he provided subtle evidence that despite the officer's insinuations, Dogon was not driven by racial hatred.

### The Importance of Audience

Thus far I have focused primarily on the dyadic exchanges between the Community Watch team and LAPD officers as both sides struggled to channel the perceptions of later audiences. However, many of the daily encounters involved the immediate audience of Skid Row bystanders. On-looking residents often played an active role, impacting the ability for either party to restructure recorded events in their favor. As a result, residents were used as "props" to convey information about the way things "really are" in Skid Row, while creating dissonance in the subtle and minor cues at the heart of the opponent's projected narratives (Goffman 1959). Additionally, those individuals that were enlisted in previous interactions could be drawn upon in later encounters to buttress efforts to characterize the behaviors portrayed on tape.

For LACAN, this meant cultivating favorable resident behavior that echoed their claims of LAPD mistreatment. Footage of community residents vocally supporting LACAN was essential in confirming the accuracy of the organization's neighborhood frame. It also helped to further portray LACAN as a representative defender of the community in contrast to the depiction of LAPD officers as invading and harmful outsiders. As in the two-way interactions, officers were not without the ability to contest these images. Officers drew on a number of interactional techniques that served to reverse the organization's intended portrayal of community support. In the following field notes, the Community Watch team approached a mounted officer as he arrested a woman sitting on the sidewalk:

I stood on the curb videotaping the arrest as two male residents passed behind me. One of them turned to me and asked, "Hey man, what are you filming for?" I repeated the standard LACAN response as instructed in training, "We're filming the police to make sure that they don't violate anybody's civil rights." The man in the street seemed satisfied with my answer. He nodded his head and smiled, saying "right on." Suddenly, his facial expression changed. I saw him look toward the officer and ask, "Hey man, what are *you* filming for?" I was surprised, and turned my attention back toward the arrest. The officer was now standing behind his horse with his cowboy hat lying lightly on the top of his head. He was resting his elbows on his saddle pointing his camera-phone at me. He replied to the man with a smile, "Oh me? I'm just filming to make sure that he doesn't violate *my* civil rights. I don't really know what this guy is gonna try to do." Hearing this, the man looked back toward me, and then back toward the officer with a puzzled

look. He scrunched his eyebrows and muttered, “Oh word?” The man appeared unable to discern which party to believe.

This incident demonstrates the enlistment and reenlistment of witnesses on the street. Upon hearing the standard Community Watch script, the passerby gave indication that he approved of LACAN monitoring the police. The standard Community Watch response was successful in positioning the LAPD officers as aggressors that, without an LACAN presence, would readily violate citizen rights. However, the resident’s approval appeared to wane before he was fully enlisted, once the officer pulled out his own camera. By asserting that he was making sure that *his* civil rights were not violated, the officer problematized LACAN’s delineation of the harmful party. By conducting his own surveillance he recast himself as the victim in the interaction, with LACAN as the aggressor. Like the earlier officer’s evocation of Dogon’s jailhouse tattoos to offer a less-than-altruistic rationale underlying Dogon’s surveillance, this officer’s appeals similarly corrupted the footage captured to that point. Both officers drew on techniques that served to inject footage with images that separate LACAN from the community it claims to protect.

With this opening, officers at times attempted to inject additional contextual information.

The interaction continued:

The officer turned his camera-phone from me to Dogon and the rest of the group still standing in the same location. “Hey, why don’t you guys come a little bit closer for the picture?” The officer reached toward the ground. He picked up a syringe and asked, “Did you get a picture of the syringe over here? Be sure you

get his on film too. I know how much you guys like to film the real truth around here.”

This portion of the exchange reflects a further step by the officer to corrupt the organization’s desired footage. His statements characterized the sensationalism and bias of the team not for the passerby, who had now left the scene, but for any future viewers. By “reminding” the team to film the syringe, the officer moved from deflecting incriminating contextual information to highlighting his own. He made an indirect indictment of Community Watch filming practices, accusing them of omitting and editing information that does not readily incriminate officers. He also introduced the syringe as the purpose of the arrest. Rather than preying on innocent members of the community as LACAN claims, the officer refocused attention on the wrongdoings of the criminal in custody. The officer presented himself as a victim of LACAN’s aggressive filming practices as he was simply attempting to carry out his professional tasks.

As Small (2004) argued, neighborhood frames inevitably highlight some aspects of the neighborhood and not others. This bias and selectivity manifested in the struggle over the images captured on video. While LACAN members emphasized the solidarity that existed between neighbors and downplayed those individuals’ possible addictions and other “ills”, officers attempted to infuse footage with opposite scene that confirmed Skid Row’s infamous reputation. Given that their project sought to problematize “common sense” about the neighborhood, LACAN understood the importance of cutting down on the negative images that might end up on tape. This meant that videos depicting agreeable scenes in which residents appeared quite similar to those living in more “decent” neighborhoods were sometimes privileged over footage that captured arrestee’s egregious drug use or violence. LACAN also advanced that images of small,

white, and female residents were likely to depict the damages caused by policing than images of large, African-American, and male residents.

In their attempt to confirm Skid Row's popular image, officers further re-enlisted the immediate audience through magnanimous treatment of arrestees. Because LACAN strove to document "typical" patterns of abuse, repeated images of kind and helpful officers supplanted the organization's more accusatory claims. This was especially frustrating for the organization, and organizers expressed that officers only behaved this way when LACAN cameras were present. The following excerpt continues the previous exchange. While the original officer was holding up the syringe to ensure the Watch team's documentation, a senior lead officer (SLO) arrived on the scene:

A squad car slammed to a stop a few feet away facing the wrong way on the one-way street, blocking the lane closest to the sidewalk. The SLO exited his car. He walked briskly toward the woman now handcuffed against the wall, acknowledging neither the Watch team members, nor the original officer. The SLO asked her, "Do you have housing?" She had a confused look on her face and responded that she did not. He continued, "Alright, look, when you get out, if you need some housing, here is my card. Get a hold of me and we can set you up with some kind of housing situation, ok?" She took a moment to look at the card and then thanked him with a quiet "God bless you." Without another word, the SLO turned around and headed back to his squad car. He walked past Dogon and shook his head in disapproval. He asked Dogon, "Geez man, you're still out here with this filming, huh? I don't know when you guys are gonna finally get it. Let me



know when you *really* want to help the community. I can fill you guys in.” Dogon responded in a yell, but the SLO was getting into his car, pulling away.

The SLO’s actions constructed an image radically at odds with the one preferred by LACAN. First, his demeanor approaching the woman, virtually ignoring all other parties, implied a singularity of purpose. He appeared most alarmed with the possibility that the woman might lack housing, *not* with the possibility that LACAN members have surrounded the scene and might have captured footage that incriminated his fellow officer. By ignoring the cameras, the SLO used this single instance as a representation of his behavior in general. Next, his actions presented later viewers with two contrasting parties. On one side were the LAPD officers, who, though they arrested the woman, made clear steps to provide her with housing, the area’s most highly sought resource. On the other side is the Community Watch team, who, given their organizational resources and inability to interact with any arrestees during a police stop, could not offer services in this manner. The team’s inaction was further problematized by the statements the SLO made to Dogon that the organization “still doesn’t get it,” and that they should let him know when they “*really* want to help the community.” For later audiences, the LAPD is more likely to emerge as overly concerned with the well-being of Skid Row residents, justly balancing sanctions with support.

### Who Represents Skid Row?

Efforts to enlist nearby residents were rooted in an important struggle to show one’s own party as the “real” representative of Skid Row. While addressed indirectly in much of the

discussion above, these performative contests warrant additional attention. As part of the struggle over the “correct” neighborhood frame, both parties utilized interactional strategies to demonstrate that they alone had Skid Row’s best interests in mind. Beyond showing the way the police “really act” in Skid Row when the cameras were not present, LACAN used this struggle to build their own credibility to rival the persuasiveness of LAPD narratives. LACAN publicly emphasizes its use of civil rights education, mandatory uniforms, video storage protocols, curriculum in nonviolence, and drug overdose response training to help define themselves as expert practitioners, able to offer community services unavailable to the police.

However, by interrupting and redirecting filming, officers had the capacity to overlay negative information about LACAN that not only portrayed the organization as the enemy of the community, but also diminished the organization’s status as expert practitioners. During the most overt occasions, officers provoked residents into verbally (and even physically) lashing out at the Community Watch team. When officers detained a suspect on the sidewalk, they sometimes misled the individual, telling them that Community Watch was actually working on behalf of the police. On multiple occasions, I heard officers whisper, “Smile, your video is going on the LAPD website for your friends and family to see.” This always brought a hostile response, usually in the form of residents cursing the team, giving orders to immediately cease filming. Officers were quick to arrest Community Watch members for interfering with a police investigation in the event that they attempted to speak to the detainee to clarify their intentions. Without the equal ability to defend themselves to fellow community residents, LACAN was put in a precarious position. Even if previous officer conduct on the tape could have served as authoritative evidence supporting the organization’s claims, the impact was significantly diminished by negative reactions by Skid Row residents.

This process unfolded more frequently through the use of subtler techniques. The following examples come from a series of field notes recorded in an exchange between the Community Watch team and the same SLO, as Watch members were filming an arrest:

Another squad car made its way up the street from the opposite direction. I saw that it was the SLO from the earlier interaction. He briskly got out of his car and walked to Dogon, who was standing next to me and said, “So, can I ask you a question?” The team and roughly twelve bystanders turned around to fully face him. Dogon nodded his head upward and the SLO continued, “The other day, in front of that store over there, you came out and just stood there while those two women were beating each other up. You didn’t stop them from fighting. How come you didn’t do anything to help them? I had to come and break up their fight. I want to ask you, are you for the homeless? Or are you just anti-police?” Dogon was rendered uncharacteristically speechless with the officer’s line of questioning.

The SLO mirrored LACAN techniques to catch officers slipping by opening an interactional space and then asking unexpected and incriminating secondary questions. Interrupting filming to inquire about an unrelated incident had the potential to undermine bystander support while delegitimizing LACAN as expert practitioners. Recounting the incident, the SLO reframed breaking up fights as synonymous with helping the community. Yet this is a task that officers are uniquely equipped to address. In several of my previous conversations, Dogon reported instances in which he witnessed individuals attempting to stop a fight that were inadvertently entangled in the fray by the time police make arrests, or worse, by the time one of the combatants drew a

knife. Furthermore, unlike officers who live elsewhere and are only “on the clock” when they put on their uniforms, Community Watch team members live in the community as private citizens. The SLO downplayed this distinction, holding Dogon to the professional standards of the LAPD even when Dogon was acting in his free time as a citizen. This can be seen as yet another method of presenting future viewers with divergent ideologies for helping the community. Yet, Dogon did not allow the SLO’s characterizations to go unchallenged:

Dogon replied, “We’re policing the police *for* the residents. We’re making sure you don’t violate rights. I mean, more ambulances are out here because of the beatings you guys put on people than anything else! Plus, breaking up fights, shoot...that’s your job, not mine.” The SLO turned slightly toward the onlookers standing on the sidewalk. He pointed at Dogon. “This guy’s supposed to be looking out for our community, right? We’re a community out here, we gotta protect each other.” Before he finished his statement, a man behind Dogon yelled out, “Shit...you ain’t here to help nobody. All you do is come around here and harass us!”

By stating that Community watch was “policing the police *for* the residents,” and that “more ambulances are out here because of the beatings you guys put on people,” Dogon problematized the SLO’s definition of community assistance. Dogon presented a hierarchy of harmful actors, in which the police do more damage than the residents do to one another. Community Watch is thus selective in its targeting, devoting resources to those who do the most harm. Dogon moved from defending the Community Watch project to defending his actions in the recalled scenario. His

statements cut into the officer's contrasts between the LAPD and Community Watch by insisting that the SLO's actions did not merit commendation because breaking up fights is simply a part of his daily tasks as an officer. Dogon's statements present an alternative contrast, between the SLO simply living up to his job description, and Dogon, a private citizen, devoting his time and effort to go beyond civilian duties to improve the community. Interestingly, like the SLO, Dogon located a new definition of community assistance within a set of behaviors and criteria inaccessible to the opposing party.

With his notion of community assistance now contested, the SLO moved to sway the LAPD-LACAN dichotomy back into his favor by attempting to enlist resident bystanders. He drew again on Dogon's inaction at the grocery store to separate Dogon from the community and the police that form an inclusive "we." Problematically the SLO's attempts to demonstrate community support on camera were invalidated when the bystanders cursed him, demonstrating that they align with Dogon and LACAN. Though failing to enlist community members to his ends, the SLO did not concede to Dogon's characterizations. Instead, he drew on additional set contextual information and Skid Row's negative popular image to re-characterize the source of the residents' antagonistic behavior:

The SLO paused for a moment, and took a step toward his squad car. Without warning, he quickly turned back to Dogon, "I mean you guys have these cameras. You guys have the power to say, 'Hey, look what's going on in the streets.' And you guys can bring us the video, I mean, you're out here more than we are and you guys have the videos. You know exactly who the drug dealers are, and what

they do. You can help us clean up these streets, but you guys refuse to be a part of the solution.”

By insisting that LACAN was present in the streets more than LAPD officers, the SLO initially appeared to surrender the argument that LACAN was more in touch with the community than the police. However, he highlighted that while LACAN had a high level of access to street-level activities, the organization made the conscious decision *not* to record destructive and illegal activity such as drug dealing. According to the SLO’s argument, turning a blind eye to illegal activity was equivocal to facilitating those individuals in their illicit pursuits. With this new contextual information offered, the hostile reactions of the crowd toward him took on a very different light. These community members may not have simply been innocent bystanders frustrated by police presence in their neighborhood. Instead, their vocal solidarity may have derived from the favor won by the organization by refusing to turn them in to the police or impede their criminal behavior. Throughout this interaction, the SLO emphasized the need to protect the community from itself – by breaking up fights and by prosecuting drug dealers. He constructed a dichotomy within the Skid Row neighborhood, between good and bad inhabitants, with LACAN grouped in the latter. Doing so allowed him to concede that LACAN is in fact *of* the community. However, the organization is not necessarily *for* the community in the positive sense that the LAPD is.

### **Community Watch Leads to Victory (and Defeat?)**

Deploying a folk sociology of policing to better anticipate police contact and utilizing micro-interactional techniques to capture incriminating officer behavior, LACAN members actualized their neighborhood frame by compelling the city to significantly reform policing policy and practices in Skid Row.

One of the first successful applications of video evidence came not long after Community Watch patrols began in 2005. The “Sanford and Son Video,” as the footage came to be called, showed LAPD officers seizing milk crates and shopping carts from homeless residents. The footage further showed that when the Community Watch team asked why the officers were confiscating these items, the officers stated that they had been in contact with the rightful owners and were going to return the property. However, this is not what occurred. Capturing the incident from start to finish, Community Watch followed the officers as they drove the seized property to another part of Skid Row while blasting the theme music from the 1970s Sanford and Son television show over loudspeakers. The officers called out to nearby homeless individuals sleeping in the area, and enlisted them to unload the confiscated crates, and distribute the items back into the homeless population that had made camp nearby. The officers were also shown compensating these individuals with small items that appear to be some sort of contraband or money. When the Community Watch team approached the officers minutes later, the officers made several joking comments that they were never actually given directions to return the confiscated items. Officers’ own words closely paralleled the LACAN claim that the police exercise inappropriate and illegal levels of discretion, willfully disregarding constitutional rights and selecting targets quite arbitrarily among the neighborhood population. By releasing the confiscated crates back into the population, and by compensating homeless individuals with contraband, they were actively creating future crimes and contributing to the negative image of

the neighborhood. These residents, in possession of illicit items, would soon come back into contact with LAPD officers. Shortly after recording the footage, LACAN and its attorneys released the video in a press conference attended by city officials and representatives of the mayor's office. As a result of the event, the city agreed to significantly reform their confiscation practices when dealing with those living in Skid Row.

Following the success of the Sanford video, LACAN escalated its campaign for reforms by introducing other videos and photographs collected during Community Watch patrols as evidence in three federal class action lawsuits against the city, the LAPD, Chief Bratton, and a number of Skid Row officers. In the first suit, *Quarles v. City of Los Angeles*, the organization alleged that the LAPD violated residents' First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights through repeated and unlawful detentions, searches, and "move along" orders. In the second suit, *Cangress v. City of Los Angeles*, the organization alleged that the LAPD employed a policy and practice of intentionally targeting LACAN staff and volunteers, including Pete White and General Dogon. In the third suit, *Lavan v. City of Los Angeles*, the organization alleged that the LAPD and city maintenance crews illegally confiscated and destroyed the property of homeless individuals living in Skid Row. Of the three, LACAN held the *Lavan* suit, decided in July 2011, as one of the most significant victories in the organization's history. The suit resulted in a temporary restraining order, and later an injunction prohibiting: (1) the seizure of any property in Skid Row absent a reasonable belief it is abandoned, and (2) the destruction of any property without maintaining it in a secure location for a period less than 90 days. The court further ordered that any LAPD or city employees confiscating any such property must leave a notice for the rightful owner in a prominent location.



It is unlikely that the *Lavan* suit, or its resulting injunction, would have been possible without the consistent efforts on behalf of the Community Watch team. In January 2011, LACAN began receiving increased reports from residents that the city had returned to the troublesome confiscation practices depicted in the 2005 Sanford video. In response, Dogon began devoting a majority of time on Community Watch to documenting how Skid Row officers and city maintenance workers treated residents' property. The team discovered that the LAPD and city maintenance department had developed a schedule and protocol, whereby each morning at approximately 9:30am they utilized skip loaders, bulldozers, and personnel to rake items from the sidewalk into the street, eventually carted away by large flat-bed trucks (see figure 2). In response, Community Watch patrols would sometimes spend up to two hours simply walking behind the convoy, documenting their every move.



Figure 25. City maintenance cleaning crew with LAPD escort.

In addition to collecting hundreds of hours of footage, the Community Watch team made contact with those individuals whose belongings were being seized. Tony Lavan was one such man. On March 17, 2011, Mr. Lavan left his EDAR – a sturdy, four-wheeled tent donated by local non-profit, Everyone Deserves a Roof – with several other homeless men while he took a shower at the Union Rescue Mission. While he was gone, the LAPD-maintenance crew confiscated and destroyed his and two other men’s EDARs, which containing medical prescriptions, laptops, and other valuable items. Long-familiar with LACAN on account of the daily and highly-visible presence of Community Watch throughout the neighborhood, Mr. Lavan quickly agreed to become the lead plaintiff on a class action.

As an additional component of their efforts, LACAN enlisted the Los Angeles Catholic Worker (see Chapter One) and other ally organizations to document any illegal seizures that they encountered throughout the course of their own activities. On several occasions I accompanied Dogon as he rerouted Community Watch patrols to check in at the Catholic Worker's "Hippie Kitchen" – a soup kitchen on Sixth and Gladys Streets – to collect photos, footage, or other updates on confiscation practices occurring on the eastern side of the neighborhood. In one of these updates, members of the Catholic Worker presented Dogon with a collection of photographs depicting LAPD officers confiscating homeless individuals' shopping carts and dumping the contents into the street, which they later loaded into a flat-bed truck or destroyed. Those whose property was confiscated provided written testimony that when they attempted to claim and retrieve their belongings from the street, officers threatened to arrest them. These individuals joined Mr. Lavan in the class action suit.

As I sat in the courtroom observing the June 2011 proceedings, it became clear that the practices undertaken by the Community Watch team out on the streets translated into clear advantages in the courtroom. First and foremost, the breadth of the evidence collected allowed LACAN to overcome their low status characteristics that, throughout the organization's past legal and media campaigns, had served to severely diminish the credibility of their claims. This history was not lost on the City's attorneys. As the court transcriptions show, the City firmly requested a full evidentiary hearing, in which all plaintiffs would be required to physically appear in court, testify, and become subject to cross-examination and additional scrutiny. With this move, the City attempted to capitalize on the fact that the statements of LACAN members and other homeless and impoverished Skid Row inhabitants tended to fare poorly when contrasted with the testimony of uniformed, well-spoken, and professional-looking police

officers and city employees. As one City Attorney appealed to this imbalance, “We would like an opportunity to testify. I think it fills in some of the gaps. I think hearing live testimony gives the Court and opportunity to see and hear the people themselves, to make some credibility judgments as to how they come across, how they appear just as they would in front of a jury.” Yet, the presiding judge denied this request due to the fact that “the affidavits, declarations, and the evidence attached to the declarations is sufficient for the Court to hear argument and make a ruling.” Thus, the judge allowed the evidence generated as the result of Community Watch to stand in for the verbal testimony of individuals who are typically considered to be deficient material witnesses.

With the court focused on the images portrayed in the evidence, rather than the individuals providing that evidence, the judge began to doubt the validity of the City’s claims. On several different occasions, the City made arguments that were deemed by the judge to be contradicted by photographs taken by LACAN and the Catholic Worker. When the City claimed that LAPD officers had *never* confiscated shopping carts, and that not a single individual had attempted to reclaim their belongings, the evidence clearly demonstrated otherwise. By the conclusion of the proceedings, the judge had grown noticeably frustrated with the recurrent inconsistencies in the City’s account, and ultimately ruled in favor of Mr. Lavan and the other plaintiffs.

### *The Price of Victory?*

In July 2011, I received a phone call from Dogon asking if I would be interested in participating in a few Community Watch patrols. He communicated that he wanted me to have a

first-hand look at Skid Row after a month of the injunction. Taking him up on his offer, I was astonished as we began walking through the neighborhood. Within only a short period of time, the level of trash on the sidewalk now surpassed anything I had previously seen, or imagined. Streets and sidewalks that at one time had been some of the cleanest in the neighborhood, had become overrun with debris of all kind. Figures 4 and 5 compare the amount of debris on the corner of Sixth and San Julian Streets in March 2011 (shortly before the injunction) and two months later in August 2011 (after the injunction). “This is what they call following a court order,” Dogon said, shaking his head as he kicked a Styrofoam container into the gutter. “Look at this shit. Can you believe this? So the court told these motherfuckers to quit stealing people’s shit, and what do they do? They say, ‘Ok, I guess we’re just not going to clean up anything at all. You assholes are on your own.’ That’s what they did. They aren’t even cleaning the streets anymore. Now you got all this shit just piling up.” I confirmed Dogon’s contentions on a Community Watch patrol led by Debbie the following day. We followed the LAPD-maintenance convoy throughout their rounds through the neighborhood. I watched as they drove past entire mounds of debris, both on the sidewalk and in the street, that they would have stopped to pick up only months prior.



Figure 26. Sixth and San Julian Streets prior to the *Lavan* injunction (March 2011).



Figure 27. Sixth and San Julian Streets following the *Lavan* injunction (August 2011).

The injunction, and the city's new street cleaning policy that followed, not only led to a swift deterioration in Skid Row's physical environment, but, in an ironic twist, it also had negative effects on LACAN's larger agenda as well as the organization's capacity to organize fellow community members against aggressive policing. As we followed the LAPD-maintenance convoy past the Midnight Mission, a large African-American woman who had been sitting on the curb stood to confront us when she noticed Debbie's LACAN shirt. "Oh, you're LACAN?" she asked in a hostile tone. "Ya'll is the reason why they ain't picking up the trash no more around here. Ya'll is the reason why everyone is getting sick with all kinds of diseases. The rats are

living all up in the trash, they're getting bigger, the roaches are getting bigger and they're biting everybody." Debbie stepped forward and cut her off, keeping her usual polite tone and slow cadence. She took her time describing the *Lavan* suit, the injunction, and the city's refusal to clear any items from the street. I was surprised how quickly the woman was won over to Debbie's argument, even asked Debbie for a copy of the *Community Connection*.

It did not take long to determine the source of the woman's misinformation. I walked ahead of Debbie and turned the corner in pursuit of the LAPD-maintenance convoy as the two women finished their conversation. Another woman who was sitting against the wall of the mission called out to the driver of the squad car who was providing an escort to the crew that walked past a soiled mattress piled high with clothes and remnants of cardboard boxes. I pressed close to the wall to listen to the brief exchange but stay out of sight until the officer pulled up the street.

Woman: Hey, why ain't you cleaning up the street no more? (pointing across San Julian at the mattress)

Officer: Well, we want to, but we can't.

Woman: What do you mean you *can't*?

Officer: They won't let us clean up the streets anymore (pointing at Debbie, who was now rounding the corner). You want the streets clean again? You have to talk to them. Talk to LACAN.



“Just watch,” Dogon instructed me the next day when I returned to the LACAN office for another patrol. “The pigs ain’t going to pick up any trash, and then they’re going to take their pictures of all that trash all over to the judge like, ‘Look, these people are a bunch of animals. They won’t clean up their own shit, so we have to do it for them.’” Dogon and other members of LACAN feared that the injunction might have the ultimate and unanticipated effect of amplifying the very stigma and negative stereotypes that the organization devotes itself to combatting. It did not take long for Dogon’s prediction to prove accurate. In that same month, the City took this very argument to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, claiming that the injunction was preventing city agencies from keeping Skid Row clean and safe. The City also claimed that the injunction was detrimental to the health of area officers, citing that because of the additional trash along the sidewalks two Central Division officers had become infected with a drug-resistant strain of staff infection and two others suffered scabies infections (Vaillancourt 2012).

Back in Skid Row, LACAN came under renewed attack by its long-standing opponents. A number of the area’s most prominent social service providers and business interests argued that this single court ruling had undermined all improvements brought about in the previous six years of policing policy. “We nearly demolished the Skid Row of old,” Reverend Andy Bales, CEO of the Union Rescue Mission, lamented in a *Los Angeles Times* interview. “It’s right back to where it was” (Zavis 2012: A1). With the rising levels of debris, the LAPD and their supporters dug even further into their previous arguments that physical disorder was inevitably leading to breakdowns in the social order and an increase of crime – a rather straightforward retelling of Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) broken windows hypothesis resting at the heart of the

2006 initiative. “As the aesthetics go down, the crime goes up,” the SLO in charge of the western section of Skid Row offered (Zavis 2012: A1). In a lengthy 2012 *Times* editorial citing the injunction as “enabling homelessness,” Carol Schatz, president and CEO of the Central City Association, argued that “Block after block, the sidewalks have been taken over by people leaving heaps of material that in most contexts would be considered garbage. Rats can be seen among the piles. Thefts have gone up 46% in the year since the injunction. The judge issued his order to protect people living on the streets, but having observed it in action, I’d say they have been harmed by it. They are most often the victims of the increase in crime” (Schatz 2012).

In April 2012, the LAPD announced that in response to the changing conditions in Skid Row the department was redeploying an additional 46 officers to Central Division – the largest infusion of police resources since the 2006 Safer Cities Initiative (Vaillancourt 2012). According to LAPD Deputy Chief Jose Perez, the redeployment was primarily designed to address what the department perceived as a dramatic downturn in the quality of life and loss of order. For LACAN members and organizers, the move was a major blow. Since the launch of SCI, the organization had dedicated itself to decreasing the unrivaled numbers of officers patrolling the neighborhood and mitigating the damages residents suffered at the hands of constant police interventions. As a result of the organization’s victory in the *Lavan* suit, however, the LAPD only amplified its attempts to “tame” Skid Row as well as increase the public support necessary to deflect opposition. It appeared as though much of LACAN’s hard-fought successes, achieved throughout several years of intense organizing, were neutralized with a single administrative stroke. Yet, as I accompanied the Community Watch team on continued patrols and observed how they continued to adapt their techniques of resistance, I was reminded that the struggles over *Lavan* were part of a longer sequence of battles that had been fought between various

neighborhood actors throughout Skid Row's history. As the historical analysis in Chapter One demonstrated, dramatic and seemingly-definitive shifts in dominant social control techniques often generated the very neighborhood conditions that led to their eventual defeat and reversal. Just as the *Lavan* victory paved the way for intensified policing, this intensification may very well open the door to new avenues and means of resistance in the near future.

## **Conclusion**

While contemporary research on the proliferation of broken windows policing has been helpful in drawing attention to an increasing punitiveness of urban governance, there is scant consideration of the possibilities of consistent collective challenge by its targets. As a result, we know very little about the sources of resistance, the forms it takes, and its potential outcomes. Drawing on the case of the LACAN's Community Watch program, this chapter addressed this lacuna in several ways.

First, I showed that in order to more fully understand responses to policing, in particular resistance, analyses must become more sensitive to the neighborhood frames held by those who are the targets of social control. This chapter demonstrated that residents' divergent perceptions of what Skid Row "really is" helped to explain why some individuals – Dogon and his fellow members of LACAN – united to contest LAPD policies while other inhabitants – like the men at the weight pile or the Fifth Street vendors – adopted more individualized and compliant responses. The different neighborhood frames held by each group conditioned how the same empirical police behavior – whether a citation or a narcotics sting – was interpreted and experienced. The most overt, vocal forms of opposition tended to emerge when policing was

interpreted as threatening or disruptive to residents' preferred vision of the neighborhood, its population, and themselves. For those involved with LACAN, Skid Row policing was interpreted as undermining their framing of the neighborhood as the site of a viable community that, despite residents' very low-incomes or other supposed ills, was characterized by unmatched levels of solidarity and mutual support. These individuals perceived the pervasiveness of police interventions as undermining the "natural order" of social life in Skid Row while contributing to the very conditions of unemployment, homelessness, addiction, and destitution that propelled Skid Row's infamous reputation.

Next, I demonstrated that the concrete practices of resistance are intimately tied to neighborhood frames. In Skid Row, these practices were designed to supplant negative and discordant perceptions of the neighborhood by imposing residents' more favorable perceptions of the area. For LACAN, this meant reducing the prevalence of unwarranted police detainments, citations, and arrests through its Community Watch program. To do so, Community Watch developed specific tactics to deter mistreatment and abuse of police power. This required the Community Watch team to "see like a cop" in order to better anticipate when and where they were most likely to encounter officers acting problematically. The team also developed strategic interactional techniques to generate footage in which officers provided self-incriminating behavior that could be linked to the detrimental effects of police perceptions of Skid Row. By "catching officers slipping," LACAN was better equipped to overcome the lack of credibility that characterized their preferred vision of Skid Row and their claims of mistreatment. LACAN's challenge of policing was also a challenge to their neighborhood's and their own denigrated status. Lastly, by detailing Community Watch patrol tactics I was able to document a powerful feedback process. Just as neighborhood frames motivated Skid Row residents into action, these

acts in turn confirmed and reinforced the way in which these individuals perceived their neighborhood.

This chapter has further demonstrated the dialectical process by which resistance develops and unfolds. As residents actualize their neighborhood frames, these frames necessarily compete with the perceptions of the area as held by officers. Consider the antithetical ways in which LACAN and the LAPD conceived of the role of the aggressive policing in Skid Row. For LACAN, pervasive police contact within a viable, low-income neighborhood was harmful in that it jeopardized solidarity and hindered economic opportunities. For officers, pervasive police contact within a rehabilitative, transitional space was akin to social work outreach in that it disallowed inhabitants to become comfortable enough to continue avoiding the recovery programs that they so badly required. Disputes over police policies and practices, which manifested in heated and sometimes violent interactions between residents and officers, were thus inseparable from a larger struggle over the “correct” neighborhood frame.

Given the dialectical nature of this process, analyses of resistance must devote additional attention to counter strategies evoked by the police. While officers may certainly continue or even amplify their original patrol practices in response to challenges, they may also develop reactions that are tailored specifically to residents’ repertoire of tactics. In the daily exchanges on Skid Row streets, as well as in the aftermath of the *Lavan* decision, officers structured their responses to undercut the neighborhood frame LACAN strove to actualize. Whether grafting damning images of drug addiction on Community Watch footage, inciting aggression between fellow residents, or allowing debris and filth to overtake the sidewalks, officers showed how Skid Row “really is,” thereby reinforcing the area’s infamous reputation. In doing so, they

solidified justification for contentious patrol practices and even prompted the city to amplify its drive to “tame” the spiral of addiction and anarchy perceived to plague Skid Row’s streets.

## CONCLUSION

Theodore Caplow (1970) writes that every scholarly field has certain topics that generate enduring intellectual fascination. For literary scholars this topic is *Hamlet*. For geneticists it is the fruitfly. For sociologists, Caplow (1970) argues, this topic has long been Skid Row. Why the lives and conditions of those at the bottom of the social, economic, political, and moral hierarchy should be a continuing source of interest for sociologists is no real puzzle. Skid Row's physical and social location – at the very margins of society – is instructive not only about the “decent,” “law-abiding,” and “mainstream” society against which it is contrasted, but also about the ways that those beyond its boundaries view and act toward the groups and individuals perceived to have skidded into the most deviant of statuses.

While it is neither the longest-standing nor the most-studied of the nation's Skid Row districts, in the last two decades Los Angeles's Skid Row has cemented itself as the most infamous. Dubbed the “the homeless capital of America,” it boasts an unrivaled saturation of extreme poverty, homelessness, SRO hotels, emergency social services, parolees, mental illness, and drug addiction. In 2006, with the launch of the Los Angeles Police Department's Safer Cities Initiative, Skid Row earned an additional distinction. The area became home to arguably the largest concentration of standing police forces found anywhere in this country, if not the world. In addition to its massive redeployment of LAPD officers into the 50 square-block area, the initiative represents one of the most intense examples of broken windows policing to date. In the first year alone, SCI resulted in over 9,000 arrests and 12,000 citations primarily for misdemeanors, small offenses, and minor forms of “disorder” such as loitering, panhandling, jaywalking, illegal vending, and sitting on the sidewalk.

This dissertation set out to utilize recent developments in Skid Row policing as a lens for understand how authorities attempt to better control marginal social groups, and how those groups may counteract such efforts. To accomplish this task, the project asked: (1) how are policies like the Safer Cities Initiative reshaping the manner in which cities regulate impoverished, homeless, and stigmatized populations; and (2) how are these forms of policing reshaping these groups' social organization and everyday experiences? More specifically, how do the targets of policing respond to and resist this regulation? As each of the chapters demonstrates, Los Angeles's Skid Row is a fitting lens indeed.

To begin to answer these questions, Part I undertook a historical analysis as well as an ethnographic revisit to Skid Row policing of the twentieth century – as detailed most famously by Egon Bittner (1967). Employing a longer-term approach than current studies of policing, I illustrated that we are in fact witnessing a new and historically unprecedented form of social control. In the past, Skid Row policing was primarily designed to fulfill a containment function, quarantining Skid Row denizens within the neighborhood while keeping deviance at “normal” and “acceptable” levels. In this task, patrol techniques were largely indifferent, and sometimes even antithetical, to the aims of rehabilitation. Since the 1990s, however, this patrol model has undergone a pronounced shift, toward what I term “therapeutic policing.” In today's Skid Row, the previous containment function has become overshadowed by a marked therapeutic orientation. Taking on a significantly revised role, officers now function as a kind of outreach social worker, utilizing their daily patrols to “guide” Skid Row inhabitants toward intensive rehabilitation and eventual re-integration into mainstream society. Utilizing persistent, impromptu detainments throughout the neighborhood's streets and sidewalks, officers present Skid Row inhabitants with a powerful ultimatum: either enroll in one of the neighborhood's



recovery programs or face a number of consequences, including the confiscation of belongings, citation, or arrest. Over time, as the fines for citations mount, driver's licenses are suspended, arrest warrants are issued, and jail sentences increase in length, inhabitants are expected to recognize the error of their former ways, begin to make more "acceptable" behavioral choices, and embark along a desired trajectory of recovery. These measures are simultaneously leveled against those individuals deemed as cognitively incapable of making correct choices as well as those perceived as defiantly unwilling to obey officers. Arrests, for example, serve to get the former group "into the system" while incapacitating the latter category, extracting their negative influences from the neighborhood.

This model of "therapeutic policing" signals the arrival of what we might think of as a "welfarization" of criminal justice. While I am by no means the first to point to the close connections existing between social welfare and criminal justice policy (for others see especially Garland 1985, 2001; Handler 1995; Beckett and Western 2001; Peck 2001), my research reveals a dynamic that has been largely overlooked in this discussion. A number of scholars have argued that since the 1980s, but rapidly accelerating with the Clinton administration's welfare reforms of 1996, these two policy realms have displayed "eerie similarities" (Handler 1995: 137). The time limits, strict eligibility standards, and work requirements now governing social welfare, and the three-strikes laws and lengthened sentences now characterizing criminal justice are viewed as reflecting an analogous punitiveness rooted in the ideals of deterrence and retribution. Loïc Wacquant (2009) has pushed the analogy further, arguing that beyond sharing common traits, social welfare and criminal justice have become linked in a common institutional function: the double regulation of poverty on the employment and crime fronts. Wacquant (2009) asserts that

the two policy realms work hand-in-hand to invizibilize problem populations rather than attempt to correct them. As he states:

In lieu of the *dressage* (“training” or “taming”) intended to fashion “docile and productive bodies” postulated by Foucault, the contemporary prison is geared toward brute neutralization, rote retribution, and simple warehousing – by default if not by design. If there are “engineers of consciousness” and “orthopedists of individuality” at work in the mesh of disciplinary powers today, they are not employed by the department of corrections. (Wacquant 2009: 296, emphasis original)

This dissertation has demonstrated that while Wacquant’s (2004) “engineers of consciousness” may no longer pace the halls of the prison, they have clearly begun to patrol the streets of Skid Row. Officers have shifted their primary responsibilities to better reform those who have fallen through the growing holes in the social safety net; a new role that is based on transforming wayward individuals into responsible, self-regulating, and contributing citizens. In this process, the tensions that many scholars have theorized to exist between punishment on one hand and rehabilitation on the other have found new forms of resolution as the welfare office has become melded with curbstome justice.

But where does this new model of policing come from? Neither a conspiratorial “plan,” nor some kind of functional “need” of a larger social or economic system, I show the emergence of therapeutic policing to be the result of varied historical developments rife with contingencies and marked by heated struggle between contending interests. In this I see two extra-local factors

as particularly influential. The first is the expanding role and influence of private, non-profit social service organizations – what Jennifer Wolch (1990) terms the “shadow state.” Recent federal and state reforms to social welfare policy not only ushered in “a punitive attack on dependence” (Katz 1996: 332), leading to dramatic reductions in the levels of support available to poor people, they also restructured the administration of services. In Skid Row and elsewhere, organizations like the Union Rescue Mission and the other mega-shelters have quickly become experts in delivering the direct services hitherto supplied by government – including emergency shelter and food, welfare provisions such as General Relief and SSI, programs intended to improve physical and mental well-being, and employment training. Yet, to accumulate the funding necessary to operate, these organizations are required to attract financing from both private donors and public contracts. In doing so, they must appear to be making substantial progress while at all times publicly decrying the severity of problems that require their renewed efforts. Overstating the dangers of deviant behaviors and poor individual lifestyle choices are primary strategies utilized to tap into moral debates, evoke fear, and attract new resources (Rooney 1980).

The constraints of this new funding environment have caused many non-profit and community-based service organizations to lose much of their role as incubators of social movements or, in this case, vehicles for altering aggressive police policies and practices (Withorn 2001). As we saw in Skid Row, rather than maintain their historical antagonisms, Skid Row’s service organizations have entered into a close and at times, symbiotic partnership with local police. As a result, many of those organizations that would be most capable of tempering aggressive policing have become its most vocal advocates. This realignment supports Huey’s (2007) contention that we must recognize the police not as mere technical instruments for

handling crime, but as political-economic actors, negotiating the demands placed upon them by different local constituencies. When social service organizations dominate the local power structure and moral economy, as is the case in Skid Row, it will be of no surprise that these organization's interests and needs are reflected in police policy and frontline practices.

The translation of these organizational interests into policing closely relates to a second extra-local factor: the wide-scale popularity and adoption of Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows theory. While there has certainly been a noticeable level of confusion, conflation, and mutation occurring as this theory has been applied to frontline practices, there are notable consistencies that are important to highlight. First, the adoption of the broken windows paradigm in Los Angeles, as in many other cities, has led to the adoption, at least rhetorically, of "community policing" efforts. Case in point, soon after he arrived in Los Angeles, and in the lead up to the launch of the Safer Cities Initiative, Chief Bratton institutionalized regular community policing meetings with representatives of those organizations perceived to be Skid Row's most influential stakeholders. The Mayor's Office, City Hall, and the LAPD were quick to hail SCI as ushering in a new model for improving communication and collaboration between the police and the communities they patrol. As illustrated in the words of a Central Division lieutenant, "the Safer Cities Initiative is the closest to community policing that a city the size of L.A. is ever going to get." Yet, as I reviewed official meeting minutes, email correspondences between attendees, and sat in on these gatherings as part of my fieldwork, I noticed a troubling and recurrent theme: the input of grassroots organizations and the voices of residents were either minimalized or wholly absent. Despite Central Division leadership's frequent claims, the community was *not* getting the policing that it wanted. Rather, only a small portion of the community – if we consider the mega-shelters' executive directors and public relations officers

members of the community – was getting the policing that it wanted. Whether in court, in city council hearings, or in the media, Central Division representatives were able to debase their opponents by stressing the unanimous support expressed in recent community policing meetings.

Second, the wide-scale adoption of the broken windows approach has greatly assisted the police in becoming even more effective in negotiating the demands of influential constituents. Whether labeled by departmental leadership as “order-maintenance,” “zero-tolerance,” “problem-oriented,” or “disorder” policing, these derivatives of the broken windows theory are all premised a similar logic. Each utilizes quality-of-life laws – prohibiting the mundane behaviors engaged in by nearly *all of us*, often on a daily basis – to provide the legal grounds to initiate a stop-and-frisk, or to apply more formal legal sanctions such as citation or arrest. Simply put, the broken windows paradigm has provided officers with a dramatically expanded repertoire of tools that they can now mobilize for a vast range of discretionary, extra-legal, and in this case, therapeutic purposes. Beyond compelling Skid Row inhabitants to take up behaviors perceived as more conducive to recovery, these law enforcement tools can also be mobilized to sanction those organizations viewed as “competitors” to the neighborhood’s dominant social service organizations. Those organizations who failed to support the mega-shelters’ project of intensive rehabilitation, those who stressed improvement through collective empowerment, and those who delivered social services according to alternative philosophies, were punished for “enabling” inappropriate lifestyle choices while condoning drug activity and crime. In sum, lacking a viable opponent and largely insulated from viable criticism, the pendulum of policing has taken a dramatic swing into its current state.

Given the ossification of this policing model over the last decade, it is critical to assess the consequences of relying so heavily on coercive law enforcement means to bring about

therapeutic ends. The chapters in Part II combine to illustrate the detrimental and scarring effects on those who are subjected to this disciplinary project. Let us imagine, for moment, that therapeutic policing was actually successful in accomplishing its goals. Let us imagine that the available statistics *did not* indicate that officers' patrol tactics have largely failed to move a large number of individuals off the streets and into the mega-shelters' recovery programs. Even if this was the case, and it clearly is not, we would still be required to weigh such immediate and temporary benefits against the long-term costs suffered by its targets. Even if inhabitants are made uncomfortable enough to enroll in the mega-shelters programs, receive drug counseling, job training, and new "life skills," what then? When they emerge from these facilities, they often do so with stacks of unpaid citations, outstanding warrants, criminal records, and the lasting legal entanglements that sociologists have shown to create a myriad of *additional* barriers to securing housing, employment, and upward mobility (see Western *et al.* 2001; Pager 2007). When all is said and done, the "side effects" of this "treatment" may be more detrimental than the issues for which they are intended to address. Thus, despite its intentions to solve the troubling conditions plaguing Skid Row, therapeutic policing threatens to solidify, amplify, and multiply these conditions for decades to come. As the "fall" to Skid Row is explained in terms of drug abuse and the "typical" Skid Row inhabitant is "re-made" into the criminal-addict, policy interventions are becoming centered on instilling self-control, while a myriad of issues associated with, and compounding, extreme poverty – whether homelessness, unemployment, or even racial discrimination and exclusion – are neatly reduced to individualized products of poor choices and excessive living.

While the negative and long-term impacts on life chances and understandings of urban marginality are damning of the current forms of Skid Row policing in their own right, the

chapters of Part II undertook the task of uncovering how therapeutic policing has had significant effects on the everyday social world of Skid Row. Each of these chapters showed different ways in which the omnipresence and aggressiveness of policing reaches deep into the realms of interpersonal dynamics and interactions to intimately (re)shape the manner in which neighborhood inhabitants come to understand themselves, their peers, and their community. In an attempt to begin to understand these processes, I focused my inquiry on the ways in which those in Skid Row responded to, and even resisted the disciplinary pressures pushing down on them from above. As pervasive as policing was shown to be, these groups and individuals were far from the hapless victims commonly portrayed in academic and media accounts. Rather than relegate their responses “to the more shadowy realms of social problems and deviant behavior” (Piven and Cloward 1979: 5), I considered how, following Scott (1985), their responses can be considered “everyday forms” of resistance. I presented several ways in which those in Skid Row drew on meaningful and tried local practices to adopt quiet patterns of action that stood in stark contrast and opposition to the dictates and epistemological underpinnings of therapeutic policing.

Chapter Three showed how Skid Row inhabitants developed indigenous forms of recovery outside of what they perceived as the disrespectful, infantilizing, and ultimately counterproductive setting of the mega-shelters. Relying on shared biographical factors – in this case their common transformational experiences while incarcerated – men like Steel, Tyrell, and James formed a close-knit, though exclusive peer group through which they carved sobriety and a worthy sense of self out of the difficult neighborhood conditions they faced. Chapter Four considered the efforts of Skid Row street vendors to pull a steady income from the informal economy despite the threat of unexpected and unwanted police contact. In order to better evade and subvert police scrutiny, Jackson, Stevie, and Warren developed a folk sociology of policing

– what I term “seeing like a cop” – that allowed them to make officer behavior more legible. Learning what tended to attract police attention, the men strategically manipulated their own appearances and instituted an informal system of regulation to better control the various behaviors and people that surrounded them.

While these everyday forms of resistance did prove effective in prolonging inhabitants’ abilities to rehabilitate and secure livelihoods on their own, if often meager and frustrating terms, the men of the weight pile and the vendors of Fifth Street did eventually buckle under the weight of Skid Row policing. Their largely individualized and unorganized brand of quiet resistance could not hold off coercive police interventions indefinitely. In considering the obstacles to more lasting and large-scale resistance, I found that Skid Row’s “territorial stigma” – a pervasive form of denigrated spatial and social status – often compounded the pressures of policing. Skid Row’s taint of place pressed down on inhabitants in ways that not only created barriers to collective, formal resistance, but also resulted in their implicit, though often direct accepting, confirming, or reinforcing of popular stereotypes about the neighborhood and its population. Steel and his crew (sometimes literally) fought to confirm their identities as *in* but not *of* Skid Row, distancing themselves from the addicts who they felt, unlike themselves, “belonged” in the neighborhood. Doing so, the men closed themselves off to a range of opportunities to build community with many of the individuals beyond the weight pile similarly experiencing the effects of policing. The vendors took a somewhat opposite tack. They worked to demonstrate that they were both *in and of* Skid Row. They worked hard to “blend in” as those stereotypically believed to live in the neighborhood. Yet, these efforts had similarly atomizing results. As the men began to turn on each other and sanction those who appeared too “out of place” according to popular conceptions



of the neighborhood, their attempts to “see like a cop” ultimately served to internalize and reproduce the gaze of officers.

While my empirical account confirms much of territorial stigma’s theorized impacts – in particular its ability to undermine solidarity by fostering mutual distancing and lateral denigration – I have shown that that its splintering effects are by no means automatic. In fact, as Chapter Five’s account of the Los Angeles Community Action Network demonstrated, territorial stigma can also become a critical source of unexpected collective action. Through “moments of community” – in particular supportive interactions with categories of individuals formerly perceived as more “belonging” in Skid Row – LACAN members came to view popular assumptions about the neighborhood and its population as not only misplaced, but intimately connected to the policing they encountered on a daily basis. Drawing on a shared neighborhood frame, their organized and formal resistance to the Safer Cities Initiative became intertwined with an attempt to supplant the territorial stigma blanketing *all* inhabitants. This meant that when LACAN took up subversive and oppositional practices they did not do so in the individualized fashion exhibited in Chapters Three and Four. Rather than attempt to deflect police scrutiny and interventions away from themselves and onto others, LACAN’s resistance efforts – like the techniques employed on Community Watch patrols – were predicated upon intervening into the interactions between officers and other members of the community, at times in ways that redirected officer scrutiny and aggression onto the organization instead.

Using their daily exchanges with officers to generate evidence capable of overcoming their denigrated social statuses and lack of credibility, LACAN has devised innovative ways of mobilizing the legal system to challenge current forms of regulation. Alongside long-standing organizations like the Catholic Worker and LAMP, LACAN has demonstrated its potential to

begin to swing the pendulum of policing away from the coercive and detrimental treatment of incorrect “choices,” back toward an increased level of compassion and perhaps more structurally-oriented forms of government intervention. Reminiscent of the efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to cement Skid Row as a viable low-income community, this collection of progressive neighborhood actors is increasingly re-establishing itself as a critical counterweight to the powerful block of non-profit social service providers that continue to call for an even further application coercive therapeutics. It remains to be seen, however, whether or not LACAN can sustain its struggle against these highly-formidable adversaries. While the recent battle over LAPD property confiscations demonstrates that “victories” are seldom definitive, can be quite short-lived, and often sow the seeds for later defeats, the future of police policy and practices in Skid Row largely depend on how the organization will be able to rebound and renew its fight.

While the outcome of the struggle between LACAN and the LAPD has yet to be decided, it appears highly unlikely that the overall number of officers now observed patrolling the streets of Skid Row and other impoverished, minority, and marginalized urban neighborhoods will be subject to any large-scale reductions. The broken windows theory underlying these new levels of deployment continues to survive and even flourish despite its empirical debunking. As this dissertation has demonstrated, urban sociologists will need to begin to more fully consider the role of the police in shaping the lives of our research subjects and the social worlds of our fieldsites.

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